

Rise of the Guardians: Night's Fury

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Category: How to Train Your Dragon, Rise of the Guardians

Genre: Adventure, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Jack Frost

Status: Completed

Published: 2012-12-07 04:04:13

Updated: 2013-01-09 02:37:11

Packaged: 2016-04-26 13:09:07

Rating: K+

Chapters: 16

Words: 23,453

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Loneliness is something that can make or break you; Jade knows this all too well, and she'll be damned if it breaks Jack. Jack/OC NOW HAS TWO FAN-MADE VIDEOS MADE BY ME! LOOK THEM UP UNDER NaruFan14!

1. Prologue

My name is Jade.

I am the last of the Night Fury, the unholy offspring of lightning and death, the fastest and deadliest dragon in the skies.

But before I was anything, before I was Jadeâ€¦|

I was a lost little girl that just wanted a friend.

Two hundred years.

I'll never understand how I survived that long on my own as a pup.

I have always been small, even for a Night Fury; in my early battles, I accumulated a large array of scars that any senior dragon would be proud of.

Sometimes, late at night, I'll remember those lonely years and feel the old wounds flare up as if being reopenedâ€¦|

It made me strong, cunning and fearless, in a way I doubt anything else could.

Butâ€¦|

In many ways, I was still a vulnerable child in a world that wanted me gone.

2. Chapter 1

Birthdays were never a happy affair for me.

I knew them, remembered the days, but I was too busy surviving to care.

My one hundredth was celebrated with an attack by a pair of Deadly Nadders, and three deep lacerations on the right side of my face that healed into my more brutal battle scars.

By human standards, I was three years old.

By the two hundredth mark, I was tired and so very lonely, walking the tightrope between human civilization and the wild where my kind hid away.

Most of the time, I was in peace-form, with the body of a small girl that had to hide her large wings and tail in order to stay alive.

If you can call my existence living.

* * *

><p>The forest was cold and empty in the depths of winter, trees frosted over and brittle in their sleep under mounds of snow.<p>

My spark burned hot in my chest, keeping me warm as I curled up in the fork of a branch, too keyed-up to fall asleep.

A pack of Terrible Terrors had been prowling around earlier that day in search of food, and I did not want to be caught off-guard.

Their hunting cries could attract any number of predators, predators I was not willing to face, and so I was vigilant.

My ear horns twitched at the faint sound of laughter, and I twisted in my perch to see the source of such a foreign thing.

Children were prancing through the snow, likely from the nearby village, clearly enjoying themselves as they tossed the powdery substance at each other in play.

Intrigued, I slid down the trunk, peeking around to study them.

Despite the world's efforts, I was still a curious six-year-old little girl.

Watching them roll in the snow, shrieking with joy and the cold, I wanted very badly to join in.

Dragons, despite popular belief, are very social creatures; I was simply not built to be solitary.

At the time, I did not know the 'why', only that I wanted to play and was too terrified to try.

I watched them play for hours, drawing in the snow with my tail,

until the small group was called back to their homes by worried mothers.

My wings had grown stiff from being cooped up in the old threadbare coat I wore, and even my tail was starting to get chilled, but I did not move to leave.

Something, deep in the bottom of my heart, told me that I needed to stay, just a little while longerâ€|

Looking up at the moon, shining through the reaching branches overhead, I wondered why.

The wind picked up suddenly, bringing a scent of pine and ice, and I scrambled to my feet, pressing against the bark in an attempt to disappear.

Peering around the rough tree-skin, I spot an older boy walking through the snow, a curved staff held over his shoulders.

The brown of his cloak stood out starkly against the paleness of his skin and the whiteness of his hair, and I wondered if he was cold.

Humans are so much more susceptible to low temperatures, and with the sun hiding beyond the horizon, it was frigid by their standards.

I don't know why I drew attention to myself.

"A-Areâ€|A-Aren't you cold?"

My voice was weak from disuse, two centuries of silence, but he heard.

After a few moments of searching, he spotted me, still mostly hidden behind a thick tree trunk.

Oh, I was so shy back then; I shrank into myself, ear horns pressed back and blending into the black tangles of my hair.

"Youâ€|You can see me?"

My curiosity got the best of me, and I shuffled slightly from my tree, nodding once.

He seemed so excited by the thought, grinning widely and exploding into the air with a whoop of joy that nearly startled me back into hiding.

Floating down only a few feet away, he practically glowed with happiness, and I wondered why the boy seemed so relieved.

"Why don't you come on out? I promise I won't bite."

Hesitation was light and fleeting, like morning dew under the first rays of sunlight.

I felt that he was safe.

Wings tucked tight against my back and tail low, I slowly abandoned

my shelter, self-conscious.

I was a little dragon-girl covered in scars; any other human would have run away in terror.

But he didn't.

He seemed a bit surprised, but there was no fear in his eyes, only curiosity.

"What's your name?"

My face warmed, and I wondered if that was what blushing felt like.

"I-Iâ€¦I don't have a nameâ€¦" I admitted, voice getting stronger the more I used it.

He seemed troubled by this, the smile that had been on his face morphing with concern.

"Your mom and dad didn't give you a name?"

A part of me went numb, remembering, and it was from there that the next words came.

"I never knew my mom and dad."

There was a moment of silence, the words sinking in, before he pulled me into what I could only guess was a hug.

Breathing in his scent, I felt my walls crumble as a sob caught in my throat, teary and painful.

His hand was cold as it rubbed soothing circles between my wings, but I found it comforting.

"â€¦You could come with me."

My ear horns perked up, hope flaring in my chest.

"R-Really?"

He chuckled softly, giving a comforting smile as he ruffled my hair.

"I wouldn't feel right leaving you out here all alone, little one. What do you say?"

Hope was burning in me so hotly that I thought it was my spark, and my eyes were feeling strangely moist.

I nodded rapidly in response, clinging to his cloak as if he would disappear and choking out the word past the sudden tightness in my throat.

"Y-Yes!"

The boy scratched behind my ear horn, sending a jolt of bliss through my entire body that caused me to purr.

"Well, then you're going to need a name!" He decided, voice bright.

Looking up, I could only blink at him in wonder.

No one had ever cared enough to even give me a name beforeâ€¦

It was like a dream.

"Well, let's seeâ€¦" He started teasingly, spinning his staff as he looked me over for inspiration. "What's a good name for a pretty little girl like you, huh?"

My face grew warm again at the foreign compliment, but a giggle bubbled up from somewhere deep inside, genuine.

"How aboutâ€¦"

His smile softened, and he crouched down to my height.

"Jade, since you have such green eyes."

"Jadeâ€¦" I whispered, testing the name on my tongue, and that's when the tears flowed.

I was Jade, I was someone, **_**I wasn't alone anymore**_**.

In a burst of magic, I spontaneously transformed into my dragon form, pouncing on the laughing boy and drowning him in dragon-kisses.

That deep place inside of me said that right next to Jack Frost was where I belonged.

3. Chapter 2

My name is Jack Frost.

How do I know?

The moon told me so.

It's the only thing the moon told meâ€¦

At the beginning, I was invisible, alone, with only the wind for company.

I followed winter across the globe those first few years, unable to find one person that could see me, but I kept returning to the little village near my lake.

That lake is the closest thing I have to a homeâ€¦

I just didn't expect anyone else to feel the same.

* * *

><p>She was so small when we first met.<p>

Poor girl barely made it up to my hip, and that was only if her little ear horns perked up.

All I saw at first were her big green eyes, pupils blown wide in curiosity.

She could see me.

I had never been so happy in my entire existence, but I did my best not to startle her.

She reminded me of a skittish horse, ready to bolt at a moment's notice, and I couldn't let the moment slip through my fingers.

But the closer I looked, the more my frozen heart twisted.

Even now, she's covered in scars, mostly bite marks and slashes, butâ€|

But she was so _tiny_.

No little girl should have to go through what she did.

She looked up at me with those big, hopeful eyes, and I'm pretty sure my heart melted.

I couldn't just leave her all alone in the cold.

So I took her under my staff, in a way, and gave her a name that matched the greenness of her eyes.

Warmth filled me at the expression of joy that shone through her tearsâ€|

And then I was tackled by about a ton of happy black dragon.

* * *

><p>Watching Jade open up was like watching a flower bloom, or the sun rise over a snowy mountain.<p>

Every day, she smiled more, laughed more, and started acting like the little girl she was supposed to be.

She was still shy at first, of course, and stayed close to me, but Jade was no longer as jumpy as she once was.

I never knew anyone could trust so completely.

As the years passed and she steadily grew old, that trust never faded.

Jade became bolder, no longer afraid to speak her mind and joke with me, and extremely protective.

Sometimes, looking back, I can't believe that this strong, vibrant teenager was hidden in the small, timid girl I remember.

At first, I felt like a big brother, protecting her from the world, but nowâ€|

Now I'm not so sure how I feel.

All I know is that I wouldn't trade Jade for anything in the world.

4. Chapter 3

The sun was bright and playful overhead, warming her wings through the wind and the snow as Jade sprawled on a toy store rooftop to sunbathe.

Purring softly, the Night Fury barely turned her head as a breeze brushed against her hide, green eyes docile and half-lidded.

"There you are!" Jack greeted, flopping down to sit against her warm side. "Is this where you've been all morning?"

The dragon cooed softly, nodding, as one wing came around to cover the frost-boy like a blanket.

Chuckling, he reached out to scratch behind an ear horn, causing the purrs to grow in volume as her scales rippled in pleasure.

"You're being real cuddly, you know that?"

The purrs did not waver, but her tail came around, one of the fins slapping Jack lightly upside the head.

"Hey!" He retorted through a burst of laughter, batting the benign appendage away. "What was that for?"

Jade huffed out a plume of acrid smoke, lifting her head as if to say 'I'm a Night Fury, not cuddly!'

Amused by the tough act, Jack scratched under the dragon's chin, and she collapsed into a purring mound of rippling scales.

"Whatever you say."

Oh, but Jade was not about to go down without a fight; rolling onto her back, she caught the chuckling boy in a bear-hug and pinned him to her chest, wings folding up to encase Jack entirely.

Laughing, Jack wriggled in her hold as the dragon licked his face, freeing his staff enough to tap her nose in surrender.

With a low grumble, she rolled back over and released him onto a pile of snow she had cleared away early that morning.

In one smooth motion, the Night Fury was standing, shaking out her scales as Jack floated in the air, feeling rather pleased with himself.

"Ready for a snow day, miss grumpy scales?"

In a rush of white-blue magic, a teenaged girl stood in the dragon's place, straightening out the long-sleeved blue crop-top and tattered jeans she wore with a sigh.

"Alright, alright, I'm comingâ€|"

* * *

><p>Whenever Jack goes to play with the children, I tend to stay behind and watch the friendly war from a safe distance.<p>

The last thing I want to do is frighten them.

Besides, I'm no good at making snowballs, even after three hundred years of practice.

So I sat on the nearest rooftop, clearing a little patch that was out of sight from below, and watched.

Though the children were clearly having fun, Jack seemed to glow with unbridled joy, swinging his staff to create ammunition left and right.

In the heat of the moment, snowballs flying overhead and laughter ringing off the snow, I think Jack felt visible.

The very moment when reality comes crashing back down, I wish I could just burn it all to ashes.

I was distracted from the happy sight by the feeling of being watched, and I whipped around, heart pounding with adrenaline and fire bubbling up my throat like lava.

Nothing.

Swallowing my fire back down, I frowned, scanning the nearby rooftops warily.

I spent two centuries being hunted; I knew when I was being watched.

But I was a fool, reasoning that my slightly-dormant survival instincts had gone haywire, and turned back-

To see Jack sending a young boy on a crazy sled-ride through the streets.

That boy is going to be the death of me.

Worried despite myself, I took off after them, jumping from rooftop to rooftop as the sled swerved onto the sidewalk thanks to the strip of ice forming rapidly beneath the rudders.

The boy's screams turned into laughter, and I wondered if that was the adrenaline taking hold.

After narrowly avoiding an oncoming sixteen-wheeler, which unceremoniously dumped it's load of furniture on the icy street, a handful of cars, and a bulldozer, the child was then sent flying through the air from a hastily-made ramp.

I couldn't help wincing as he landed in a pile of snow at the base of a statue, as concerned as his friends seemed to be.

Jack landed on the statue with a shout of delight, clearly energized, and the boy was not far behind, popping out of the snow with a grin.

My ear horns twitched, zeroing in on his excited chatter.

"Did you guys see that? It was _amazing_! I did a jump, and then I slid under a car-!"

A couch, most likely from the earlier moving fan, came out of nowhere and hit him like a rugby player, causing everyone to wince.

"_Ow_â€|" I muttered in sympathy.

I was relieved when he popped back up, holding a tooth in his hand like it was a trophy.

"Cool, a tooth!"

They were so excited that I couldn't help giggling, but it died in my throat as they moved away, ignorant of Jack's growing upset.

He took off, frustrated, and I did not hesitate to follow him up into the frigid air.

Fortunately, I am a much faster flyer, and caught up quickly, grabbing onto Jack's arm to stop him.

"Jackâ€|"

Holding back tears, sadness evident in his eyes, he pulled me into a hug and held on like I was a lifeline keeping him from drowning.

Knowing the wind would keep us aloft, I folded my wings around us, tail curling around his feet as I hugged back.

Jack is cold, but I didn't care; he needed me.

5. Chapter 4

Jack is very good at pretending.

I knew he wanted _so badly_ to be seen, to be acknowledged, and that the constant failures hurt him more than any physical wound.

He rarely showed it, however, perhaps in a misguided attempt to protect me; as he is fond of saying, Jack is all snowballs and fun times.

Whenever I tried to broach the topic, he would find a way to distract me, either with a snowball to the face or a well-placed scratch that led to hours of play until I realized the trick.

After a couple of centuries, I stopped asking, but I did not stop worrying about him.

Cracks would show through the mask sometimes, and I would be there to hold him until they closed again.

It breaks my heart to know that I'm not always enough.

* * *

><p>The sun set with little fanfare as children were herded into their warm homes by attentive mothers, streetlights coming on to bathe the streets in soft light.<p>

Laying near the edge of a rooftop, Jade overlooked the town of Burgess with a soft expression, tail swaying leisurely across the bricks.

Jack was pressed up against her side, dozing under the scaly protection of her wing, clinging to his staff like a child might their teddy bear.

Curling around him more securely, Jade checked that he was still sleeping before returning to her watch.

Scales rippling in unease, she huffed in aggravation at her own paranoia, ear horns twitching restlessly.

Hours after getting Jack to rest, she still could not fully dismiss the thought that someone had been watching herâ€|

"What's up with you?"

Turning her head, Jade cooed softly, as if asking the sleepy frost-boy what he meant.

"You've been reallyâ€|twitchy." He explained, more awake now. "Is something wrong?"

The Night Fury shook her head, pupils rounding out as if she realized the signs he was reading.

Jack smiled, rubbing her nose.

"You're a horrible liar, you know that?"

Huffing softly, she pushed against his hand as a rebuke, tail flicking the air in false irritation.

"It's the truth!" He defended, laughing, as the dragon smothered him with her version of tickling, all warm breath and soft gums.

The boy was breathless by the time Jade relented, one of her famous toothless smiles in place as Jack hugged himself to ease the pain of his laughter.

In a flash of magic, she was in peace-form, looking rather pleased with herself as she sat on the roof's edge.

"You're stillâ€|a horrible liarâ€|" Jack choked out, forcing himself to sit up.

"Whatever you say." She replied easily, echoing his earlier words

with a smile.

The sky was dark and studded with stars now that the sun had set, and the moon rose up to take it's place for the night.

Jack looked up as moonbeams reflected off the concrete, the last of his laughter fading away prematurely.

Smile dropping a notch or two, Jade followed his gaze up to the silver moon, shoulders slumping in defeat.

Her victories were only ever temporary, anywayâ€¦

Strips of gold floated down from the sky, twisting in elegant turns as they disappeared through bedroom windows to deliver good dreams.

Ear horns perking, Jade stood as the luminescent sand hovered in the streets, feeling strangely content.

"Right on time, Sandmanâ€¦" Jack muttered, sounding relieved as he joined her on the edge.

Sneaking a peek through her peripheral, and noting the sadness still visible in those blue eyes, Jade knew that what he needed was some fun.

Her tail came around, bopping him upside the head, and Jack only had a moment to flinch in surprise before the dragon-girl took off with a laugh.

"Too slow, Jackie!"

A smile formed on Jack's face as he jumped after her, momentarily forgetting his worries.

"I'll get you for that!"

"Gonna have to catch me first, slowpoke!" She shouted back, twisting around the Sandman's golden sand to avoid disrupting anyone's dreams.

The wind whistled, trying to tug her off-balance, but Jade caught herself on a telephone pole, leaping into a tree before her pursuer caught up.

One did not play a game of keep-away with Jack Frost without learning how to deal with the wind.

The game could have, and likely would have, gone on well into the night had Jade not been distracted.

Movement out of her peripheral had the dragon-girl pausing in midair, ear horns twitching nervously as her instincts screamed.

Noticing this, Jack dropped the game immediately, scanning the streets intently.

"Jade?"

"I don't know." She admitted, night-sensitive eyes darting around in an attempt to find whatever had startled her. "Something just--"

A large shadow darted by on the left, and the two whipped around, on guard.

"Did thatâ€¦|" Jade finished in a whisper, heart racing as fire churned in her throat.

Grip tight on his staff, Jack followed the shadow's trail with Jade not far behind, nervous for him.

They landed in an alley behind the local grocery store, and Jade's tail whipped around as she tried to calm her racing heart.

"Hello, mate."

The sudden voice startled both of them, and Jade barely swallowed back a fireball once she realized who it was standing in the shadows.

"Been a long time. Blizzard of '68, I believeâ€¦|"

The Easter Bunny stepped into the light, looking none too pleased.

"Easter Sunday, wasn't it?"

"Oh, you're not still mad about that, are you?" Jack teased, dropping his guard with a smile.

"Yes." The large rabbit answered bluntly, spinning a boomerang in one of his massive paws. "But this is about something else."

Jade's ear horn twitched, and she turned in surprise.

"JACK-!"

The yeti were quick to grab them before the element of surprise was gone, shoving both teenagers into a large red sack.

Roaring in outrage, Jade tried to spread her wings in an attempt to rip the sack open, but to no avail.

They were lifted with a jolt, and the pair ended up entangled within the sack as it was thrown through what must have been a portal.

Landing in a tangled heap on the other side, Jade huffed as she kicked the sack off, rolling upright and shaking her head to clear out the lingering dizziness.

"There he is! Jack Frost!"

Blinking innocently up at Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, and the Sandman, Jade looked towards Jack with an exasperated expression, ear horns pressed flat against her braided hair.

"What did you _do_?"

6. Chapter 5

"Wha-You think this is my fault?" Jack sputtered, incredulous.

"It certainly isn't mine!" Jade retorted.

"I haven't done anything!"

"Yeah, because I'm sure the Guardians just randomly stuff spirits into a sack and toss them through magic portals!"

"How come this isn't your fault!"

"Because it's never my fault!"

The assembled Guardians could only watch in stunned fascination as the teens argued, completely unequipped to deal with the situation.

Bunnymund, at least, seemed to be enjoying the showâ€|

"Well-Well, you cuddle!"

"I do not!"

"Yeah, the big bad dragon is a cuddler!"

"That's it!"

Jade tackled the frost-boy to the ground with a growl, and they wrestled across the wooden floor in a ball of flailing limbs as the elves scattered.

Worried that they would get hurt, Tooth decided it was time to intervene.

"That's enough!"

Both went still, Jack pinned underneath Jade, his staff's hook around her waist and her tail wrapped around his shins.

They looked up, blinking at the Guardians with all the innocence of children.

"Jack is not in trouble." North stated, hoping to keep the fight from continuing.

"He'sâ€|not?" Jade voiced, surprised. "I've never heard anyone else say thatâ€|Should I be happy?"

A twist of his staff helped Jack get the upper hand, and he smiled.

"Told you."

Rolling her eyes, Jade shoved the frost-boy off with ease, sitting up to shake out her braid with a huff.

"There's a first time for everything, I guess."

But her pupils were wide and playful, as they had been the entire time; the 'fight' had mainly been out of mild frustration and pent-up energy, not anger.

"Well, someone wanna tell me why I'm here?" Jack voiced, jumping to his feet and spinning his staff. "I must have done something to get all four of you hereâ€|"

A smirk crossed his face, and Jade rolled her eyes as she stood, dusting off her jeans.

"Am I on the naughty list?"

"Ha, on naughty listâ€|" North stated brightly, suddenly going serious for a moment. "You hold record. But, no matter. We overlook. Now we are wiping clean the slate."

Both teenagers gave him an incredulous, suspicious look.

"How come?" The winter spirit wondered.

"Ah, good questionâ€|" The Easter Bunny noted, not looking very amused despite his tone.

"How come? I tell you how come!" Santa claimed, loud and animated. "Because now, you are Guardian!"

Yetis raised flaming torches and the elves surrounded them, starting to play their instruments, and all Jade could think was 'What?'

Jack seemed as dumbfounded as she felt, and they shared a look that seemed to ask 'Are these crazy people serious?'

North seemed pretty serious as he took a large tome from one of his yeti, opening it and starting the ceremony with gusto.

Jade saw the look in her companion's eye, and heeded the warning.

Faster than any of the Guardians could comprehend, she took off into the ceiling's beams moments before Jack slammed his staff in a wave of ice and cold wind.

The music petered to a halt as the elves slid and the torches were extinguished, leaving a startled silence for the frost-boy to shatter.

"What makes you think I want to be a Guardian?"

Hanging upside-down by her tail, the dragon-girl saw the growing nerves in the Tooth Fairy as North tried to laugh it off.

"Doesn't want toâ€|Of course you do."

The last part was said drolly, as if it was a foregone conclusion.

"Music!"

The elves only got out a few notes before Jack glared.

"_No music_!"

Deigning the floor safe once more, Jade flipped down and landed in a crouch, wings flexing as she stood.

"Nice outdoor voice." She teased gently, softening the frown on Jack's face.

"I try." He muttered back.

"You don't want me." Jack reasoned with the Guardians, his fake smile and cockiness in place as he moved around. "You're all _hard work_ and _deadlines_, and I'mâ€|snowballs and fun times. I'm not a Guardian."

There was a defeated note in his voice that only Jade heard, and it tugged at her equally-scarred heart.

Jack avoided her gaze, knowing what she was feeling after three centuries of close contact.

The last thing he wanted was for her to cry.

"Jack, I don't think you understand what it is we do." The Tooth Fairy voiced, buzzing up to gesture towards the massive globe that took up the center of the room. "Each of those lights is a child."

"And good or bad, naughty or nice, we protect them." North added, firm.

"No, noâ€|No offence." Jack replied, looking up at the millions of lights with trepidation.

"How-How is that not offensive?" The Easter Bunny retorted as the teenagers turned their backs, feeling that the conversation was over. "I mean, what's this clown know about bringing joy to children, anyway?"

Jade stopped, scales bristling at the insult aimed for her only friend.

Jack was family, packâ€|

No one hurt Jack.

It took great effort to restrain herself, pupils vibrating with the urge to narrow in rage.

Jack would have the opportunity to defend himself.

"Uh, you ever hear of a snow day?" The frost-boy wondered, feigning innocence as he turned back to face the Australian rabbit. "I know it's no _hard-boiled egg_, but kids _like_ what I do."

"But none of them believe in ya, do they?"

Jade had no control when her pupils retracted, a growl rumbling up

from her chest as the Tooth Fairy gasped.

"Bunny, _enough_!"

It had better be, or the Night Fury would be having rabbit for dinner.

"No, the kangaroo's right." Jack assured brightly, hiding his hurt at the reminder.

"What? What did you call me?" The Australian demanded, stepping closer to tower over the smaller spirit. "I am _not_ a kangaroo, mate."

"If you're not a kangaroo, _what_ are you?" Jack challenged, glaring.

"I'm a bunny. The _Easter Bunny_. And kids _believe_ in _me_."

That was it.

With a roar and a burst of magic, the Night Fury was between them, fangs bared in a snarl and entire body bristling with outrage.

All of the Guardians jumped back, instincts kicking in, as she spat smoke and blue flames crackled in the back of her open maw.

Her gaze never wavered from Bunny's, and there was no mistake as to what had set the dragon off.

"Jade." Jack called, stern.

An ear horn twitched as it caught his voice, but the Night Fury growled lowly in disagreement.

"_Jade_."

The air was tense and heavy, like her spark's heat was filling the room, before Jade snorted and turned away with a half-hearted snap.

Wings slowly folding against her back, she circled around Jack like a cat might, purring softly and looking up at him with the same docile eyes she always had.

No one knew what to say or do next; the sudden shifts between hostility and docility had left most of the room's occupants in shock.

Jack scratched underneath the dragon's jaw, calming her, and North realized at that moment that there was nothing to fear.

She only wanted to protect Jack.

"Jack." He stated, getting the boy's attention. "Walk with me."

There was a moment of hesitation, but the Night Fury grumbled softly and nudged him forward, sitting down calmly.

After giving her a look, Jack followed North down some stairs, leaving the four in nervous silence.

Jade was completely unperturbed, watching the remaining Guardians with open curiosity.

The Sandman was the first to approach, despite Bunny's warnings, only hesitating when her gaze turned to him.

She cooed softly, a question, and her ear horns perked up at the little pictures he made with the dream sand.

With a shrug, the dragon trilled a note, almost looking ashamed as she averted her eyes.

Tooth was amazed at how seamlessly they conversed, as if they were using words instead of intricate sand pictures and growls.

Even Bunny was slightly impressed by the dragon's ability to understand Sandman's pictures; it had taken most of them years to get a good grip on it.

Ear horns pressed back, Jade whined softly, her eyes darting to the two uninvolved Guardians before coming back to Sandman.

The pictures were too fast to decipher, but she seemed to catch the gist, shaking her head in the negative so the man deflated with a soundless sigh.

"What's up with you?" Bunny wondered gruffly, tense.

His voice caused a reaction; Jade tensed, pupils retracting slightly as she pulled away from him, entire body vibrating with nerves.

It reminded them very uncomfortably of a wary, abused animal.

Sandman pat her nose lightly, and the dragon relaxed, closing her eyes as if trying to calm herself.

The other two shared a look.

Something was up with that dragon, and they wanted to know why.

7. Chapter 6

Jade did not make verbal conversation easy.

The Night Fury refused to transform back into peace-form, let alone listen to Bunny, and any attempts to make her ended with Bunny landing on his face.

Settled in the rafters, said dragon snickered at the angry rabbit's attempts to threaten her into compliance, looking completely satisfied with herself.

Sandman seemed rather amused as well, watching his fellow Guardian work himself up, though Tooth tried fruitlessly to calm him.

With an exaggerated yawn, Jade lay down on the thick wooden beam and closed her eyes, feigning sleep to Bunny's growing frustration.

"That's it, ya overgrown lizard! I'm gonna-"

A squeak from Tooth distracted the two from their feud, and Jade looked towards the fairy with obvious concern, ear horns going back as she whined in question.

Poor Tooth's expression was extremely troubled as she zipped around, as if sensing something amiss in the air, before stopping in shock.

"The Tooth Palace!"

She took off like a shot, mini-fairies at her side, and Jade transformed without a moment's hesitation, expression deeply troubled.

"Something's wrongâ€¦!"

Dropping down from her perch, the dragon-girl ran past a stunned Easter Bunny in her haste to find North, tail whipping the air as she skidded on sharp turns.

"Hurry up, slowpoke! We need to go!"

Bunny sputtered for a moment before Sandman floated past him, shrugging complacently as he followed the strange dragon.

Muttering some choice words, he bounded after them.

There was no time to waste being pissy.

Jumping onto the railing, Jade stretched up and scented the air, trying to pinpoint where her mischievous companion had wandered off to.

Ear horns twitching as she caught hold of it, the dragon-girl jumped.

"WHAT THE-SHEILA!"

Ignoring the rabbit's frantic shout, she twisted in the air, wings opening just enough so she could aim for a lower level.

A door opened, and Jack obliviously stepped out-

And got tackled by a teenaged girl.

They stopped rolling after a few feet, Jade perched on his torso and smiling brightly.

"Hi."

Wheezing slightly, Jack smiled back.

"Miss me?"

"Oh, I just _couldn't_ live without you for another moment!" She replied with a Southern Bell drawl, jumping to her feet. "Now get up, Jackie! Time to go!"

The winter spirit barely got his footing before being dragged enthusiastically into the hallway as Bunny and Sandman arrived.

"Trouble at the Tooth Palace." The Australian informed them tersely, still looking rather breathless as he sent a glare Jade's way.

Blowing a raspberry in response, and giggling at his flabbergasted expression, the dragon-girl followed a purposeful North through the crowded hallways of his workshop.

Jack was not far behind, trying to be heard over the noise.

"North! I'm not going with you guys!" He claimed as two heavy metal doors were opened into an icy tunnel. "There's no way I'm getting into some rickety old-"

Jade held an arm up to stop him as a bell started to ring.

"Sleighâ€|?"

Both teenagers watched in awe as the massive reindeer stormed out of their heavily-fortified barricade, snorting steam and bucking violently.

Jerking back to avoid getting hit in the head by an antler, Jade turned her head and openly gaped at the bright red sleigh that followed the beasts.

It certainly was _not_ the rickety old contraption they had been expecting.

Jade felt the scales on her wings ripple in excitement at the sight of it, and turned to Jack with her best Puppy-Dog Eyes.

One look, and he lost.

"â€|Okay, one ride, but that's it."

With a whoop of joy, Jade jumped in with feline grace, looking at everything in awe as Santa chuckled.

"Everyone loves the sleighâ€|"

She was certainly not going to argue with that!

"Bunny! What are you waiting for?" The Russian wondered, taking up the reins as Sandman took a seat next to Jade on the bench.

"I think my tunnels might be faster, mateâ€|" Bunny replied, pushing the sleigh nervously with one foot. "And, umâ€|And safer."

"Ah, get in!" North ordered, picking the rabbit up by his scruff and tossing him onto the last free seat. "Buckle up!"

For a moment, the Australian scrambled at the wood, ears folding back in apparent dread.

"Whoa, whoa-Where are the bloody seatbelts?!"

"Ha! That was just expression!"

Jade's eyes lit up in excitement as adrenaline thundered through her veins, scales rippling along her wings and tail like waves in a stormy sea.

Jack may be the prankster of the two, but she was most certainly the one that enjoyed laughing in the face of Death.

The yeti and elves finished their work quickly before jumping out of the way, and North snapped the reins with a shout.

Reacting with a jerk, the reindeer set off at a thundering pace, and the dragon-girl straightened up at the feel of cold wind rushing over her skin.

The moment they hit ice and entered the actual tunnel, Bunny started screaming and Jade cheered, every flying instinct in her igniting with the feeling that nothing could ever catch her now.

The sleigh curved around icy obstacles, and North seemed happily oblivious to all of the deadly hurdles they avoided with ease.

Jack grinned, both at Bunny's obvious panic and at Jade's unrestrained joy.

She was never happier than when they were flying.

With the pull of a lever, the sleigh climbed up a wall to avoid stalagmites in the area ahead, and Santa laughed uproariously.

"I hope you like the loop-de-loops!" He shouted, gleeful.

"I hope you like carrots!" Bunny grumbled back, though barely loud enough for even Jade's sensitive hearing to catch.

Sandman and her raised their arms as if on a rollercoaster, the latter letting out a shriek of laughter at the weightless feeling.

Then they were outside, racing up a wooden ramp before taking off into the clear Arctic sky.

Jade relaxed with a sigh, wings going slack against the sleigh in obvious disappointment, and Jack would not let that stand.

"Jade."

Green met blue, and her ear horns perked up in interest.

Grinning, the winter spirit jumped onto the back rim of the sleigh.

"Hey, Bunny, you've got to check out this view-"

It seemed as if the wind had shoved him overboard, and Jade could barely suppress her laughter as the Easter Bunny had a panic attack.

"He just-North-He just fell-"

When the rabbit got up the courage to check, Jade nearly fell over in hysterics as Jack's words floated up to them.

"Aw, you _do_ care."

"Oh, get off it, ya bloody show pony!"

Sandman tried to admonish the giggling dragon-child, but could not quite keep a straight face and ended up joining in silently.

Floating down next to his friend, Jack smirked as North pulled out a snow globe and tossed it, opening a portal.

In a rush of magic, the laughter was left behind as they transported and realized something was dangerously amiss.

Dark forms flashed through the air far ahead, near the mountain that held the Tooth Palace, and her ear horns perked up at the high-pitched cries that echoed to them.

Her pupils retracted, and the two teenagers shared a glance that conveyed her suspicions.

Something's attacking the mini-fairies.

Then the sleigh entered a cloud of shadowy horses and fleeing little fairies, rocking it like a rowboat in an ocean storm.

"They're taking the fairies!" Jack shouted, shooting up in a move learned from years of watching a Night Fury use their unique vertical take-off.

He caught one of the fairies just before one of the shadowy beasts, and landed back in the sleigh, hands curled around the poor little hummingbird-like creature.

Spreading her wings, Jade shielded most of the sleigh's occupants from the strange horses, wincing slightly as they struck the taut skin and dissipated.

"Hold on!" North bellowed, steering his reindeer into the mountain itself, which still teemed with shadowy horses.

Pulling her wings in, Jade hissed at a horse that got too close, seeming to scare it off.

The reins were shoved into Jack's hands, and North jumped up onto the lip of the sleigh, swords drawn.

One of the horses was foolish enough to get within range, and burst into a cloud of black sand when the blades cut through.

Something hard bounced off Jade's chest, and she winced at the suddenness of it before noticing it was some kind of container.

Her quick mind connected the dots easily.

They're stealing the teeth?

Looking up, she figured there were more urgent things to worry about.

"JACK!"

The sleigh barely avoided slamming into one of the Tooth Palace's many spires, and they skidded to a halt on a lower level.

Heart pounding, Jade shoved herself upright, tail wrapped tightly around her waist.

"I'm never letting you drive anything _ever again_â€|"

"Oh come on!" Jack replied, grinning. "Where's the daredevil I know and love?"

Ignoring the sharp flare of her spark, Jade gave him a deadpan look.

"She's wondering why she wasn't the one driving."

Rolling his eyes, and trying to pretend he had not noticed anything, Jack jumped out of the sleigh after the Guardians, looking around in amazement as the air emptied.

The entire mountain was full of spires and towers, each uniquely structured and colored, but Jade only spared them a glance.

Tooth was fluttering around above them, clearly having a panic attack about the sudden attack on her fairies and the teeth.

North, Bunny and Sandy rushed to her side as the female Guardian sank to the floor, expression heartbroken.

Wings flexing outward, Jade hesitated, tail fins opening and closing nervously.

There was nothing she could say to make everything okay, anywayâ€|

The mini-fairy Jack dubbed Baby Tooth crawled out of the boy's hoodie, chirping joyously as she rushed to her 'mother'.

Jack smiled sheepishly at the grateful look he received, but there was not long for that to sink in.

"Well, isn't that just _sweet_â€|"

The voice was dark, echoing, as if coming from everywhere at once.

In a flash of bright magic, Jade transformed, cat-like green eyes

scanning the shadows as a growl rumbled from her chest.

"Honestly, I'm a little star-struck." The voice continued, and everyone spun to see a figure standing on one of the top levels, looking rather smug from his high vantage points. "The Big Four, all togetherâ€¦I see you got my message, North."

Ear horns back, Jade hissed as she realized what the man had done.

By warning North and having him gather everyone, he had caused Tooth to leave her fairies and the teeth unprotected for a rampage.

He was much smarter than she had thought.

"Pitch!" Tooth shouted, charging. "You have thirty seconds to return my fairies, or I'll-"

The Boogeyman disappeared into the shadows, reappearing in time to cut off her threat.

"Or what? You'll put a quarter under my pillow?"

Pupils narrowing, Jade crouched down, ready to pounce.

Tooth had been so kind to herâ€¦

The fairy did not deserve this.

With a battle cry, Tooth charged, scrambling to a halt when one of those horses reared up, nearly striking her in the face with its front hooves.

"Look familiar, Sandman? It took a while to turn your dreams into Nightmares, but it was worth it." Pitch stated conversationally. "Oh, don't be nervous. They can smell fear, you know."

"What do you want, Pitch?" North demanded, swords held at the ready.

"What do I want?" He replied, voice pure restrained fury at the audacity. "Maybe I want what you have! To be believed in! Maybe I'm tired of hiding under beds!"

"Maybe that's where ya belong!" Bunnymund retorted.

Pitch disappeared into the shadows, reappearing below the Guardians with a sigh.

"Oh, go suck an egg, rabbit."

He disappeared again before said rabbit could get a hold of him, his laugh echoing menacingly off the air.

"And who is this? Jack Frost? Since when are you all so chummy?"

"We're not." Jack replied, grip tight on his staff as he scanned the area.

"Oh, good."

Both whipped around, Jade hissing, to see Pitch behind them, seemingly bored.

"A neutral party. So, I'm just going to ignore youâ€|though, you must be used to that by now."

With a roar, a blue fireball crashed into the masonry, exploding on impact.

Pitch barely avoided it, or the angry Night Fury that lunged at him, fangs snapping for his neck.

Claws gouging into the floor as she skidded, Jade roared a second time, bristling menacingly.

Bunny was rather glad he had not been given the same treatment earlier, and silently cheered the dragon on.

If anyone deserved to be roasted, it was Pitch.

The Nightmare King looked the angry reptile over in amazement, as if not quite believing his eyes for a moment, before schooling his features into the default smugness.

"What a pretty little Night Furyâ€|I haven't seen one of your kind in quite a few centuries. Such _fear_ your kind inspiredâ€|"

Her pupils rounded slightly, ear horns pulling back in shame, but Jade shook out her scales and hissed in response.

Pitch sent the assembled Guardians a sideways glance, careful not to take his eyes completely off the angry dragon.

"I'm surprised a bunch of do-gooders like you would have one with you. Don't you know that Night Furies are the unholy offspring of lightning and death?"

He transported before a blast of ice struck him in the face, courtesy of a visibly upset Jack Frost.

"Shut up! You don't know her at all!"

"Do you?" Pitch wondered, hidden in the shadows. "Perhaps you need a demonstration on how destruction a Night Fury can be."

Her ear horn twitched, but before Jade could do more, a weight suddenly landed on her back and dark sand formed over her head like horse's reins.

Jerking against the restraints, she hacked at the grains that entered her windpipe and flared her wings like a startled bird.

"Hey! Get offa her!" Bunny growled, keeping himself from throwing a boomerang in case it struck the struggling dragon instead.

Suddenly, she went still, breathing heavily but no longer fighting.

Pitch thought he had won.

Jack knew she was only just getting started.

Her feline green eyes flashed, and then Jade took off.

It was a vertical shot straight up, faster than the eye could follow, and she spun in a tight circle that cut through the air as surely as an arrow.

If Pitch wanted to ride a Night Fury, he was going to.

Twisting inches from the ceiling, Jade allowed herself to fall into a dive, weaving away from a spire with barely centimeters to spare.

With a sharp turn, she unseated her unwanted rider by slamming the Nightmare King into the corner of a wall as she flew away unscathed.

Landing near Jack, the Night Fury coughed up the last remnants of dark sand in her mouth before shaking her scales free of the irritant.

The Guardians watched her, completely speechless, and Jack could only grin.

And they thought _he_ was a handfulâ€¦

In a flash, Jade was in peace-form, sending a rather dumbstruck Pitch an irritated glance.

"Do I look _domesticated_ to you?" She growled, rather insulted. "_No one_ rides me."

It was a fact, a challenge, and Pitch stood with a smirk.

Challenge accepted.

The entire palace quaked underfoot, and Tooth gasped as she saw the walls begin to crumble.

"Didn't they tell you? It's wonderful to be a Guardian, but if enough children stop believingâ€¦"

Pitch trailed off, another tremor finishing the sentence ominously.

That was more than Bunny could take, and the Guardians charged.

Running to the edge, Jade watched some colored eggs explode as the Nightmare King escaped through a shadowy gap between the rocks, gone within moments.

Jack caught her gaze, and both knew things were only just beginning.

There is a very good reason why I never tell anyone I'm a Night Fury.

While I love being the fastest dragon alive, the baggage of being the most feared is heavy.

I am not like my ancestors; centuries of isolation, and then meeting Jack, eradicated any sadistic impulses I could have mustered.

Even the thought of attacking innocents, dragon or otherwise, leaves a taste of poisonous eel in my mouth.

It would be as unnatural as Jack hating snow days, North hating cookies, or even Bunnymund liking the cold.

I retaliate in self-defense, and even then I tend not to go for killing blows.

But if you threaten Jackâ€

I don't know what lengths I would go to make you regret it.

* * *

><p>Seated on the water's edge, tail skimming over the surface in half-hearted designs, Jade could not bring herself to look at Tooth's face.<p>

The fairy was very clearly distraught over recent events, holding the few saved teeth containers as if they were her lifeline as Baby Tooth hovered about worriedly.

Jack was crouched near her, fingers drumming nervously over the frosted wood of his staff, and the two shared a look.

Neither was sure of what to say.

"I'm sorry about your fairiesâ€" The frost-boy managed, and Jade could only nod in agreement, green eyes shining with empathy.

"You should have seen themâ€" They put up such a fight." Tooth voiced, barely managing a proud smile at the memory.

Baby Tooth zipped around them, chattering softly, and the dragon-girl chirped softly in reply.

"Why would Pitch take the teeth?" She wondered, ear horns pressed back.

"It's not the teeth he wanted." Tooth explained, showing the bejeweled surface of the container in her hands. "It's the memories inside them."

The word 'memories' caught the winter spirit's attention, and Jade noticed.

"What do you mean?"

"It's why we collect the teeth. They hold the most important memories

of childhood."

The fairy hovered over to a mural painted on the mountain wall; three interconnected circles, the center showing her accepting shining teeth from robed children.

Jack followed, the water freezing underfoot, and Jade followed confidently in his path, ear horns twitching in curiosity.

"My fairies and I watch over them, and when someone needs to remember what's important, we help them." Tooth explained, somber. "We had everyone's hereâ€¦Even yours, Jack."

The boy jerked upright, confused.

"My teeth?"

"Of course, from before."

A strong rush of emotions went through him, and only Jade's soft touch on his wrist kept him from exploding.

"What do you mean?"

"We were all someone before we were chosen, Jack."

Tooth paused, looking into his eyes with dawning realization.

"You don't remember?"

As if overcoming the shock, Jack shook his head in the negative, filling with manic energy.

"You mean, I was someone before this? I had a home, and a family?!"

Jade had never seen him so excited, and released the boy as he burst into the air, running on impulse.

"We have to get them! I have to see!"

"We can't." Tooth reminded him solemnly. "Pitch took the teethâ€¦"

The frost-boy landed on a boulder higher up, crouching as he pointed the crook of his staff.

"Then we'll get them back!"

Before the fairy could say anything in reply, she gasped, feathers falling from her skirt.

"The childrenâ€¦" Tooth breathed as the mural began to disintegrate. "We're too lateâ€¦"

"No! NO! No such thing as too late!" North shouted, causing everyone to back up from the flailing of his swords.

Jade jumped up to join Jack out of harm's way, wondering if they would see smoke come from the man's ears from how hard he was

thinking at that moment.

"Wait, wait, waitwaitwaitwaitwaitwaitwait wait â€|Idea!"

Bunny jerked back as one of the blades was pointed at his nose, but North seemed much too excited to care.

"_We_ will collect the teeth!"

"_What_?" Tooth replied, incredulous.

"_We_ get teeth, children keep believing in _you_."

"We're talking seven continents, millions of kids-!" The fairy started, zipping around at the very enormity of the task.

"Give me break. You know how many toys I deliver in one night?"

"Or how many eggs I hide in one day?" Bunny added, not wanting to be shown up.

Giggling softly as her hope was renewed, Tooth smiled.

"And you two!" North shouted, turning to the teens perched above them. "If you help, I promise we will get back Jack's memories."

Ear horns perked up in interest, Jade looked to Jack and found him looking hopefully back.

He could not ask her to do this for him.

And he would never have to.

With a grin, Jade flared her wings proudly.

"We're in."

* * *

><p>Swooping through the houses of Hong Kong, Jade rolled her eyes at the bantering between the males of their entourage.<p>

_Boys_â€|

"Jade!"

Turning her attention away from the clearly overwhelmed Tooth Fairy, she sent Jack a questioning look.

"Think you're faster than ol' Cottontail?"

"Wouldn't count on it." Said Australian voiced, sounding rather proud of himself. "Ya don't wanna race a rabbit, sheila."

A smirk crossed her face, pupils vibrating in excitement at the challenge.

"Bring it on, rabbit."

What commenced was a race for as many teeth as they could get their hands on, each attempting to outdo the others in sheer volume.

The only ones in cahoots were Jack and Jade, who traded tidbits of information about traps and who was where when they briefly crossed paths in midair.

Within an hour or two, all six of them had bags of teeth, which they showed to Tooth proudly.

"Wow! You guys collect teeth and leave gifts as fast as my fairies!"

A collective thought of 'Oh dang' spread through the assembled group, and Tooth seemed to sense it.

"You guys have been leaving gifts, right?"

Sandman nodded for a moment, before thinking about it and shaking his head instead.

Jade winced, face-palming.

"_Damn_."

After a mad dash for anything on hand, with only Sandy, Jack and Jade actually leaving quarters, they canvassed the entire city a second time to silently leave gifts for the sleeping children.

Jade lost count of how many candy canes, colored eggs, and Christmas trees she saw in the bedrooms she passed, and was glad for it.

After all, some of those kids were going to be _really_ confused come morningâ€¦

9. Chapter 8

By the time they were heading for Burgess, Jade was starting to yawn, blinking rapidly in an attempt to stay awake.

Unlike the others, she was still mortal, and needed sleep every now and then.

No matter how hard she tried, it was a losing battle.

Jack perked up when he felt a warm weight on his shoulder, and turned his head to see the dragon-girl curled up into his side, fast asleep.

Heart thudding as he took in the sight of her peaceful face, the winter spirit wrapped an arm around her waist to keep the girl from slipping onto the sleigh floor.

With a sigh, she cuddled into the boy's shoulder, her warm breath ghosting over his neck and making him shiver.

A happy little squeak dragged Jack's attention away, and he realized that they had an audience.

Tooth was practically brimming, barely containing her energy, and Baby Tooth chirped happily.

North only watched them from the corner of his eye, trying to hide a smile by steering the sleigh, and Sandman smiled, his dream sand making a little heart.

Even Bunny looked touched by the scene, though he covered it up gruffly by motioning between the two with a smirk.

"Ya forget to mention something, Frostbite?"

For a few moments, Jack had absolutely no idea why they were looking at him like that.

When his mind pieced it together, he was fairly certain he started blushing.

"Wha-No! I mean, we're not-!"

"Nothing to be ashamed of, Jack!" North assured. "Is very sweet girl, when not upset."

"But-"

"You two are so cute together!" Tooth squealed, wings vibrating happily.

Sandman motioned for them to quiet down, making sure Jade had not woken up from the noise.

Honestly, Jack did not want to know her reaction to this, either.

* * *

><p>Jade was honestly confused by all of the weird looks she had been getting since waking up.<p>

When she tried to ask Jack about it while they double-teamed a house, he just flushed and stuttered out an excuse.

Figuring that she likely did not want to know, the Night Fury let it go and continued on her quest for teeth.

After managing to steal the last five out from under Bunny's nose, which was strangely more satisfying than usual, Jade caught up with the frost-boy and Tooth in the last house.

Wings tucked in tight and tail low, she slipped in through the window, sitting there for a moment to take in the sight of the little boy sleeping.

He had been the one Jack had taken on that sled ride only a few hours before, and the memory brought a smile to her face.

"Hey." Jack greeted, looking up from the drawing pinned to the wall. "How'd you do?"

"I did alright." She replied, dragging in a huge sack of teeth.

Jack's jaw dropped.

The bag was as tall as she was!

"It's-But-How did you-?"

A wry smile crossed her face, and he felt his heart stutter.

"You don't wanna race a Night Fury, Jack."

Stepping away from the window, ignorant of said boy's whirling thoughts, Jade let the Sandman float in, merry as could be.

"Oh, you guys have done such a wonderful job!" Tooth praised softly, careful not to wake the child.

Jade's ear horns pulled back shyly, and she scuffed her bare foot on the carpet as a smile pulled at her mouth.

"It was nothingâ€¦!"

"What are you all doing in here?" North wondered loudly, squeezing through the window with a THUMP that had Tooth and Sandman shushing him.

A rabbit hole opened not long after, and a grumpy Easter Bunny pulled himself out.

"Oh, I see how it is! Let's all team up to make sure the bunny comes in last place!"

Ear horn twitching towards the little boy, Jade motioned for Bunny to quiet down, checking that he had not been too disturbed from his rest.

"What's wrong, Cottontail?" Jack teased, holding up his bag of teeth. "Having performance issues?"

"Ya call that a bag of choppers?" Bunny retorted, smirking as he held up a slightly bigger sack. "Now this is a bag of choppers!"

Rolling her eyes at their behavior, Jade dropped her own sack between them, amused by the look of shock that crossed the Australian's face.

"No, this is."

North wedged himself between them to physically break up the altercation, shaking his head.

"Is not competition. We are helping Tooth." He chided them.

The three backed down, looking slightly ashamed of themselvesâ€¦!

"But if it was, I win!" The Russian exclaimed, dropping his own massive collection of teeth as he started dancing in victory.

From the twitch of her eye, Jack could tell Jade was not very amused.

The sudden brightness from a flashlight stopped everything in it's tracks.

Jade resisted the urge to face-palm a second time that night.

"_Crap_â€|" "

The child seemed stunned, mind likely trying to process what he was seeing.

"Santa Clausâ€|The Easter Bunnyâ€|Sandmanâ€|The Tooth Fairy! I knew you'd come!"

"Surprise! We came!" Tooth replied, sounding edgy.

"He can see usâ€|" Jack whispered, almost excited.

Jade's ear horns pressed back as she saw the boy's eyes sweep right over him, and the frost-boy deflated at the look she sent him.

"Jackâ€|" "

"Sh, you guys! He's still awake!" Tooth whispered urgently.

"Sandy, knock him out!" Bunny decided.

The little man nodded, punching his palm, and Jade barely suppressed a giggle from her place hidden behind North.

"With the dream sand, ya Gumby!"

It was at that moment exactly when the child's Greyhound woke up and started growling.

"No! Stop! That's the Easter Bunny! What are you doing, Abby? Get down!" The child ordered, though his pet ignored him.

"Alright, nobody panic." Bunny assured, slowly putting down his bag of teeth.

"But that'sâ€|that's a Greyhound." Jack pointed out, suppressing a smile. "Do you know what Greyhounds _do_ to rabbits?"

"I think it's a pretty safe bet that he's never met a rabbit like me." He countered, apparently oblivious to the ball of dream sand being conjured in Sandman's hands. "Six foot one, nerves of steel, master of Tai Chi, and the ancient art of-"

Already tired of the posturing, Jade decided to step in.

With a low growl, she caught the dog's eyes, maintaining eye contact as she reached forward.

Abby's growl spiked, and she snapped, barely missing the girl's fingers.

Baring her fangs, Jade bopped the canine firmly on the nose with a sharp snarl, wings flexing and scales bristling.

Whining softly, Abby lowered her head and tucked her tail firmly between her legs, practically begging for forgiveness.

Crooning softly, the dragon-girl scratched behind a pointed ear, looking up from the suddenly benign Greyhound to find all of the Guardians staring at her.

"How did youâ€¦?" Bunny started, gesturing between her and Abby in confusion.

"Oh, she just needed to know who's boss." Jade explained with a shrug. "It gives animals a sense of-"

Jack poked a nearby alarm clock with his, and chaos ensued.

Abby, startled by the sound, immediately reverted to her earlier behavior and started chasing Bunny around the room, barking up a storm.

"Securityâ€¦" Jade finished lamely, ducking as the pair jumped over her head in a mad circle around the room.

Sandman lost hold of his sand-ball when Abby jumped off of him to get at Bunny, and while North avoided being struck, Tooth and her sole mini-fairy weren't.

The ball bounced off every available surface, eventually hitting both Bunny and Abby right in the face, and didn't stop until it had also sent North into dreamland.

When the Russian's large body hit the mattress, the boy was sent flying into Sandman's arms, who put him to sleep with a nod of his head.

Uncurling from her position on the dresser, Jade overlooked the carnage and sent Jack a scolding look.

"Whoops?"

She was about ready to scold him verbally over that response, but paused at the strange emotion in his eyes.

It was warm, and soft, and made her spark flare up like a flame meeting fresh oxygen.

Jack found himself unable to look away, taking in the gentle curves of her face, the brightness of her eyes, the softness of her lipsâ€¦

In that one moment, they saw something in each other neither had noticed in the last three hundred years.

The moment was shattered by the sudden neigh of a horse, and the two jumped away from each other in surprise as a Nightmare raced past the open window.

10. Chapter 9

A few choice words, none of them friendly, went through Jade's mind as Sandman and Jack jumped to the window.

"Come on! We can find Pitch!" The winter spirit encouraged, jumping out into the wind's hold.

Sandman seemed torn for a moment, but Jade's swift departure seconds after made the decision for him.

He worried about what would happen if Pitch got his hands on the girl.

A sense of dread was pricking at the back of her mind, like a warning, and Jade caught up in a burst of speed.

In a synchronized display of firepower, the frost-boy and the dragon-girl blasted the Nightmare to dust.

Fueled by adrenaline, Jack landed next to the frosted, torched black sand with a grin.

"Did you see that? We're _awesome_!"

"_We_?" Jade echoed, smirking. "What is this _we_ you speak of? All that awesomeness was _me_."

Chuckling, Jack swung his staff half-heartedly at her head, knowing she would dodge.

Her laugh warmed his heart, and the winter spirit turned away to avoid showing it, poking the strange sand as a distraction.

Noticing this retreat, the now-old confusion returned, mixing with concern in her belly.

Jack had never been awkward with her beforeâ€|

Then again, they had never almost kissed before, either.

A blush only just started when a presence brushed the edge of her senses.

Whipping around in a crouch, she fired, missing Pitch by only a few scant centimeters as he disappeared into the shadows.

Now on-guard, Jack scanned the rooftop as Jade slowly stood, ear horns twitching and tail stiff.

"What are you two doing here?"

Both teenagers jerked around to face Pitch, who was standing on a higher rooftop with a slightly frustrated expression.

"This isn't your fight."

"You made it my fight when you stole those teeth!" Jack claimed, unwilling to admit how upset he was by the Boogeyman's taunts towards

his friend earlier.

"The teeth? Why would you care about-?"

All three of them were startled by Sandman's sudden appearance, and the little gold man did not look happy.

Jumping away, Pitch collected himself with a dark chuckle, smirking.

"Now this is who I'm looking forâ€|"

Jade's pupils narrowed.

He had lured them out here on purpose?

Sandman proved to be very skilled with his whips of dream sand, and there was only a short confrontation before he caught Pitch's wrist and flung him around like a rag doll.

Once the Nightmare King was tossed onto the street below, Jade could only give him an impressed look.

"Remind me to stay on the nice list around you." She half-joked.

"Make that double for me." Jack agreed.

This earned them a smile, and all three floated down to confront the scrambling spirit of terror below.

"Okay, easy! You can't blame me for trying, Sandy!" Pitch voiced, struggling to his feet. "You don't know what it's like to be weak, and hatedâ€|It was stupid of me to mess with your dreams, so I'll tell you whatâ€|"

His pleading expression turned predatory, and Jade knew it was a trap.

"You can have 'em back."

Nightmares rushed up from the shadows, an entire army of them, and Jade found herself back-to-back with Jack and Sandman as they were surrounded.

"Youâ€|take the ones on the left, I'll take the ones on the right?" Jack offered, strained.

"I think I prefer the right, actually." Jade replied, tone forcibly light. "Being left-handed and all, it might be nice to switch things up."

Honestly, she could not help the joke; years of being cornered had built in a psychotic defense mechanism that involved a rain of fireballs and a wild need to get out of there.

It was the only way to keep from going crazy.

From atop one of his trusty steeds, Pitch smiled evilly.

"Are you scared, little dragon?"

"I've seen more frightening things than you." Jade snarled, wings flaring. "You don't even make the top ten."

Pitch found that was true; she was not even slightly afraid of him.

But that did not mean she was fearless.

"Oh, but I've found some old friends of yours that might have."

Her ear horn twitched in confusion.

Old friends?

"It's been a long time, Night Fury."

That voice sent a shiver of true fear through her bones, and Jade flinched at the sight of her old tormentors.

"My, haven't you grown?" A female Nadder voiced, her smile full of razors. "You were only a toddler when I sliced open your face, and just look at you now! Almost full-grown!"

The words dripped with false affection and poison, corrosive and deadly.

Jack was too angry to care.

They had hurt Jade.

"You did that?" The winter spirit demanded, the asphalt icing under his feet.

"You must be the one who took away our little toy." The other noted, spiked tail swaying dangerously. "We can't have these two interrupting our fun, now can we?"

"Of course not."

Neither noticed the sudden slits of Jade's pupils at their not-so-subtle threat, or felt the sudden swell of power as her spark flared.

It was their only warning.

Even Pitch was startled by her speed; Jade was nothing but a dark blur as she tackled the nearest Nadder into a brick wall.

"_No one hurts my pack_."

With a screech, the other Nadder rushed to her friend's aid as the army of Nightmares charged.

Meeting the challenge with a roar, Jade grabbed her stunned opponent and used her to smash the other across the face, tangling their limbs.

Releasing her hold, the Night Fury took a deep breath and fired off

three balls of blue flame in rapid succession.

Shrieking at the burn, one of the Deadly Nadders pulled herself free and charged, jaws snapping closed like a bear trap a hair's-breadth from Jade's throat as the smaller dragon swiftly evaded.

Instinct and natural intelligence took over, and the dragon-girl knew exactly where to strike.

One punch struck the unprotected side, painfully smashing into a kidney, and a swift kick shattered the kneecap.

As the woman tumbled through the air, delirious from the pain, Jade blocked the claws that aimed for her face, sending back a strike which hit squarely on a nerve bundle that paralyzed the diaphragm.

With a growl, she grabbed her by a wing-joint and threw the woman into the street below, adrenaline storming through her veins.

Fire crackled up her throat, begging for release, but a shout from above tore the Night Fury away from her violent thoughts.

The sight nearly made her heart stop.

Jack was falling.

Her magic streaked the air as she rocketed up mid-transformation, the only thought in her head being that _Jack couldn't die_.

Tumbling through the air, unable to call the wind, Jack yelped when he suddenly landed on something warm.

Blinking rapidly, the winter spirit took in the myriad of black scales beneath him for a moment before realizing what had happened.

"Took you long enough." He teased, tightening his hold on the Night Fury's shoulders.

A laugh rumbled up from her chest as Jade caught the frost-boy's crook in her soft mouth, and she offered it to him with a turn of her head.

Jack twirled the wood in his hand for a moment, smiling at the familiar feel, before Nightmares charged at them.

"Ready, fluffy?" The boy wondered, patting her neck.

With a smile full of hooked teeth, Jade twisted out of the way and blasted a fireball at the unsuspecting mare's underbelly.

The game was on.

Jack could not help laughing as they weaved through the Nightmares, freezing and burning them if Jade's wings or tail failed to shatter them.

Riding a Night Fury was almost as fun as riding the wind.

With a twist, Jade launched a fireball at a Nightmare that tried to sneak up on North's sleigh, and Jack jumped onto one of it's fins as she swooped away.

Dark sand surrounded the Sandman, closing in on him, and the Night Fury let loose a barrage of lightning-blue fire to weaken the ring.

Before she could repeat the attack, a thick quill struck her in the side from below, the pain sharp enough to force a transformation.

Hissing as she pressed around the quill embedded near her hip, Jade bared her fangs at the furious Nadder, whose wings beat slightly out of time with each other.

"I'll kill you, you little eel!"

More quills flew from the dragon-woman's tail as she twisted, and Jade spun to avoid being struck a second time, pulling her wings in to dive-bomb her enemy in those few moments of vulnerability.

They tumbled through the air in a snarling, hissing mass, Jade wincing as claws dug into her shoulders.

With a roar, she ripped them out and used all her strength to kick her opponent straight down.

"SANDY!"

Jack's shout yanked the Night Fury's attention back up to the little golden man-

Just as an arrow of dark sand struck him in the back.

"No!"

It was like her heart twisted, and Jade took off like a shot, bursting through the dark sand and out again, Sandman held to her chest in a hug.

"Sandy? Sandy, are you okay?"

But the darkness was spreading like a virus, and she felt tears building up behind her eyes.

"Sandy!"

A sad, reassuring smile filled his face, and his untainted hand came up to pat her nose.

The tears came then, and a sob caught in her throat as Sandman dissolved into black sand in her grasp.

He was gone.

Through the blur of her tears, she spotted Pitch, and the sorrow morphed into white-hot ****rage****.

His death would not be in vain.

Pitch had not expected any real retaliation; the Guardians would be too grieved by the loss of their comrade to do anything but retreat, and Frost was not strong enough to do anything by himself.

The Night Fury was not part of his calculations.

Fire exploded on impact with the nightmare sand, scattering it into a useless spray, and Pitch moved just in time to avoid getting tackled off his cloud.

Her eyes were like green fire, the pupils thin as paper, and he knew she was aiming to kill.

All Jade felt was rage; there was no pain, no fear, only the burning thought that _Pitch deserved to burn, too_.

A tidal wave of nightmare sand rose up, threatening to swallow her whole.

"**JADE**!"

Then Jack was there, between her and danger, draining out all of the rage to replace it with sharp surprise in a moment.

"_Jack_-"

And they were swallowed by darkness.

Shielding her face from the sharp grains, Jade felt a wave of cold wash over her before a massive blast of ice froze the sand into an explosion of black hail.

Thrown back by the force, the dragon-girl could only had a moment to catch her breath as Jack wobbled, losing his grip on consciousness in midair.

Swooping in to catch him, she held the frost-boy close as she turned and raced for the sleigh, guilt gnawing at her insides.

_If she hadn't lost control_â€|

Crumpling in the sleigh, Jade winced as the adrenaline faded, checking her wounds as they escaped through a portal.

Tooth gasped at all the blood staining her clothes, and even Bunny looked ill when he spotted the large quill still buried in her hip.

Taking a few deep breaths to cope with the pain, Jade looked towards her friend as he sat up, still dazed.

"Jack?"

"'M alrightâ€|" He muttered, vision swimming for a moment before zeroing in on all the red.

Seeing the sudden concern in his eyes, the Night Fury tried to smile.

"It's really not that bad. I've had worseâ€|"

"Like what? Ya lose a leg?" Bunny demanded gruffly, moving to put pressure on her shoulder wounds as Tooth fluttered around in a panic and North urged the reindeer faster.

"Almost got my arm bitten offâ€|" Jade admitted jokingly. "Does that count?"

Her nonchalance about the whole thing was more disturbing than all the blood.

Jack felt his heart squeeze as helped put pressure around the quill, not caring that it stained his hands red.

What exactly had Jade been through before he found her?

11. Chapter 10

****Merry Christmas, everyone! I know this is a pretty sad chapter, but I didn't have time to make the really fluffy one that's coming next. Hopefully, you like this one anyway.****

* * *

><p>The atmosphere was solemn throughout the workshop, with no one willing to break the heavy silence.<p>

Sandman's death had hit them all hard, but Jade's behavior was even more worrying, especially for Jack.

It was like she justâ€|shut down.

Her eyes were blank, like a wall, and no amount of prodding could so much as get a twitch out of the doll-like girl.

Even when Jack purposely pulled on her tail, desperate for any reaction at all, she had only blinked at him.

But Jack was not going to lose her.

Not like this.

The remaining Guardians had been unnerved by the steely determination in the boy's suddenly icy eyes, though they still followed him to the infirmary where Jade was sitting, having been patched up hours before.

Her ear horn twitched at their arrival, but there was no other sign the girl had registered the presence of others.

Clutched in her hands was the quill that had been removed from her flesh, green eyes locked on the sharp weapon as if trying to untangle the mysteries of the universe.

"Jade."

Her grip tightened, but she made no move to respond.

Refusing to give up, Jack stormed into the room, oblivious to the jagged ice that crept into the woodwork at his feet.

"_Jade_."

That was the tone he had used when the dragon-girl had first transformed, angry at Bunny for hurting his feelings, and it caused her pupils to instinctively widen.

When she did not move to look at him, Jack pinched one of her ear horns.

Pain snapped Jade out of her trance, and she winced, green eyes meeting blue.

"I don't know why you're closing me out, but you're going to stop _right now_." Jack stated, firm. "Iâ€|"

His voice softened, a flash of the lonely boy shining through his eyes.

"I miss youâ€|"

For a moment, the Night Fury was still as a statue, pupils vibratingâ€|

And then the floodgates opened.

The winter spirit faltered as her eyes suddenly filled with tears, and panic was soon to follow as she began to openly cry.

Releasing her ear horn as if burned, Jack scrambled for a way to calm the girl down.

"I didn't-But I-I mean-!"

Without a word, she grabbed the frost-boy and buried her face in his hoodie, arms locking around his back as sobs wracked through the girl's chest.

Slowly wrapping his own arms around her shaking shoulders, Jack thought she was mumbling something, and rested his forehead on her hair with a sigh.

"Let it out, fluffyâ€|Come onâ€|"

Words slowly took form from her mumbling, and it tore at everyone's hearts.

"I'm so sorry so sorry couldn't make it should've been faster _so sorry_ not strong enough not good enough please don't leave me _please don't leave me alone_ I can't take being alone I'll try harder _I promise I'll do better_-"

She was on an endless loop, sobs punctuating her more earnest statements, and Jack tightened his hold, rubbing circles between Jade's limp, twitching wings.

"Sh, shâ€|It's okay, fluffyâ€|I'm right hereâ€|"

Tooth was the first to approach, hovering carefully before doing her best to enclose the two teenagers in her arms, humming an ancient lullaby to soothe Jade's tears.

North did not hesitate to join her, pulling all three into a bear hug, though he was careful not to crush anyone.

Bunny, however, hesitated.

Hugging really was _not _his thingâ€|

Just one look at her heartbroken face, even half-hidden in Jack's chest, was enough to make him hop over anyway.

After all, he reasoned, _Jade was still a child, and it was their job to protect them_.

She flinched violently at the slight touch of his paw, trembling, and it reminded Bunny of her defensive reaction during their first meeting.

"I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry-"

It was a punch to the gut to realize that _she was terrified of him_.

"Relax, sheilaâ€|" He muttered, patting her hair down. "Everything's gonna be a'rightâ€|"

Slowly, slowly, Jade relaxed, and her sobs turned into sniffles as the sadness took the last of her energy.

For what seemed like the first time, the assembled Guardians took in the scars and wondered where they had gone wrong.

* * *

><p>The funeral was a quiet affair, and neither teenager attended.<p>

After her emotional breakdown, all Jade wanted to do was hide up in a corner and try to forget everything that had happened.

To keep her from shutting down a second time, Jack coaxed the fragile girl into an embrace, humming a soft tune that neither recognized, but was soothing all the same.

Curled up on the frost-boy's lap, Jade played with the strings of his hoodie, pupils big and watery as she watched him make designs on the windows with his powers.

When one created an image of Sandman, she nudged Jack's chin with a low purr, her tail wrapping around the boy's thigh.

A smile began to form, and Jack rested his forehead on her hair, taking comfort from the dragon-girl's heartbeat.

Relieved, Jade began to play with the hem of the baggy white t-shirt she wore, claws fraying the fabric slightly.

Her other clothes had been drenched in blood, so Jack had offered the shirt he wore underneath his hoodie while a yeti dug up a pair of shorts for her.

Jack felt a strange sort of pride, seeing her in _his_ shirtâ€|

"Jack?"

Blinking away the confusing thoughts, the winter spirit lifted his head to see the uncertainty fill Jade's eyes despite her closed expression.

"What ifâ€|" She trailed off, a fang pricking her lip nervously. "What if weâ€|?"

There was no need for the girl to finish the question; it shone through her eyes, a need for reassurance and a gnawing worry that maybeâ€|

Maybe she would end up alone again.

"Come on, fluffy." Jack teased, butting their noses in a sign of affection usually reserved for her dragon form. "After three hundred years, you still have to ask?"

Jade growled softly, but there was no heat to it; truthfully, she was a bit comforted by the reply.

Smiling at the adorably upset expression on her face, Jack shifted positions to free both hands.

"But if you insistâ€|"

Ear horns perking at the concentration of magic between the frost-boy's clasped palms, Jade watched with bated breath as ice condensed and molded itself into a new shape.

Once done, he only smiled and offered the innocuous object for the dragon-girl to take.

Jade could only stare at the ring, awestruck.

The band was a twisting spiral, smooth on the inside, and what looked like a glass rose showed it's delicate petals.

But it was the words carved on the inside that made her spark flutter.

'Jack & Jade-Never Alone'

"This has some of my magic inside." Jack explained, depositing the frozen jewelry into her hands. "So we can find each other if we ever get separated."

Jade fiddled with the seemingly-delicate ring, a blush rising on her cheeks as her instincts whispered fiercely.

Dragons, unlike most species of animal, only took one mate in their considerable lifetime.

Unlike those animals, dragons are fairly intelligent--though the Gronckle was still up for debate among the majority--and took precautions to keep their mates from being taken.

Certain species, like Monstrous Nightmares, scarred their mates in unique ways, or, like Terrible Terrors, used strong hormones as a signal to keep away unmated males.

Most, however, took a more--human approach.

Precious gems and metals are common in the magically-protected areas dragons reside in, so dragons tended to mark their mates with things like necklaces, bracelets and earrings.

--They were also a way to proposition an unmated female--.

Though she knew Jack could not possibly know that, Jade was also aware of the human tradition to use rings as a way to mark someone as a significant other.

How often had they rested in a tree overlooking the park and watched a nervous man propose to the love of his life?

And while Jack had poked fun at their anxiety, he seemed to have caught on to the significance of it, if this gesture was any indication--

Jade doubted he understood what he was asking.

Chuckling at her wonderfully embarrassed face, Jack rested his head against a twitching ear horn, watching her fingertips run over the smooth ice over and over again.

"Do you like it?"

Pausing in her actions, Jade smiled.

"More than anything in the world."

The sound of footsteps caught their attention, and her fingers curled over the ring protectively before Jade realized it was North.

More subdued than usual, he studied the teenagers with surprisingly intense eyes before speaking.

"How are you two feeling?"

Jade could only shrug, curling into Jack's embrace as if that would keep the dark memories away.

"Alright, I guess--" The winter spirit answered for both of them, a frown tugging at his mouth as his gaze turned to the window. "I just wish I could have done something--"

The statement was echoed in the girl's eyes, and North moved to sit on the ledge with a low chuckle.

"Do something? You two stood up to Pitch. You saved us."

"Butâ€|Sandyâ€|" Jade started, voice cracking on the fallen Guardian's name.

"Would be proud of what you two did." The Russian insisted, firm.

Neither would admit it, but his words gave them some comfort.

After all, North had known Sandman for much longer than they had.

Placing one hand on Jade's head and the other on Jack's shoulder, the Guardian of Wonder pinned them with a serious look that conveyed his utter belief in the next words he spoke.

"And no matter who you were before, you are both Guardians now."

Those words strike something deeper than anyone could have realized, and thoughts race through Jade's mind in an attempt to piece together this new feeling.

The Guardians were, in a very familiar way, a family.

A pack.

North was saying they were Guardians.

They were part of the pack.

And no one messes with Jade's pack.

Jack knew that look, that stubborn determination and protectiveness, like it was his own.

It was the look that came whenever someone tried to hurt him, taunt him, throw him away without a second glance.

It was a look that promised retribution.

Pitch wanted a war?

Well, Jack thought to himself as a similar feeling filled his chest, _a war was what he was going to get_.

12. Chapter 11

The lights were going out.

Before their eyes, the once shining globe grew dark as thousands of little golden dots extinguished.

Without Sandman's dreamsâ€|

"Cheer up, ya sad sacks!" Bunny demanded, using the control panel as a stage. "There's still hope. Easter is tomorrow. I say we pull out all the stops, and get those lights flickering again!"

With renewed determination, North began to storm through his workshop, with the others struggling to keep up through the horde of yeti.

"Bunny is right!" He declared, herding the four magical beings into an open, spherical elevator. "As much as it pains me to say, old friend, now Easter is more important than Christmas."

Bunny was stunned for a moment, but then a grin broke across his face in happy disbelief.

"Did you hear that?" The Australian rabbit demanded excitedly, hopping out of the elevator with renewed vigor.

"We must hurry to the Warren!" North shouted, voice booming over the normal hustle and bustle. "Everyone, to the sleigh!"

"Oh no, mate!" Bunny cut in, blocking the path to said flying contraption. "My Warren, my rules. Buckle up."

Jade could not help a rush of excitement as she remembered the fun she had last time had said those words, and the Easter Bunny tapped the ground twice with his large feet.

North only had a moment to say something in Russian before a giant hole opened in the ground and everyone fell in.

Tucking her wings at the last second, the dragon-girl shrieked in delight as she slid and spun down the tunnel, blood rushing through her ears like a tribal drum.

Jack laughed at her blatant excitement, practically skating on the tunnel walls to avoid running into the flailing yeti or screeching elf that had joined the ride as well.

The end came much too soon for Jade's liking, but landing on North's belly was certainly fun.

Giggling, the dragon-girl rolled onto the grass, flexing her wings and fins.

"Ha, buckle up!" North muttered, levering himself upright. "Is very funny."

Waiting a moment for the world to stop spinning, Jade looked at the springtime paradise in slack-jawed amazement.

"_Whoa_!"

Bunny grinned, looking rather proud of himself as large stone eggs uprooted from the grassy ground.

"Welcome to the Warren."

That was when a _wonderful_ smell reached the girl's sensitive nose, and her entire body vibrated with bliss.

Jack had never seen her pupils dilate so wide.

"Jade?" He questioned, curious as everyone else about her sudden

jitteriness. "What is it?"

Rocking on the balls of her feet, ear horns perked and tail at attention, her big green eyes darted around before landing on a large patch of tall grass.

"Dragon nip." She muttered, scales rippling like waves in the middle of a storm.

The girl twitched, trying very hard to keep her focus on the others, butâ€|

Oh, it just smelled so _good_!

A hand landed on her shoulder, and she almost leapt out of her skin before realizing it was Tooth, a smile on her face.

"Go on, sweet tooth."

"Yes, have fun!"

Blinking at them in bewilderment, she sent a questioning look towards Bunny, who shrugged with a smile and motioned towards the grass.

"â€|I love you all _so much _right now."

With that matter-of-fact statement said, she transformed and leapt into the grass like a puppy that had just received a new bone.

It was almost surreal, seeing such a fearsome-looking dragon purr and play in the grass like a small child, rubbing her head in the sweet-smelling blades and rolling to spread it along her wings.

Laughing at the sight, Jack floated to the edge of the circle she had made, smirking.

"Man, I wish I had known about this soonerâ€|"

The Night Fury grumbled something at the boy, but did not pause in her routine.

"Hey, even I need to mix things up every now and then!" He retorted, smirk widening. "Can't keep using the old reflected-light trick."

Without warning, a wing came out of the grass and knocked the frost-child over with a yelp.

"Hey!"

The Guardians watched the two play in amusement, finally able to sense the true camaraderie between them that they had missed before.

Never one without the other.

Bunny was distracted from the rather humorous sight of Jack being pinned by a rather snuggly dragon, and was immediately alert, ears

flicking and nose twitching rapidly.

"Something's up." He warned, and everyone tensed as a swarm of eggs ran out of the adjacent tunnel on panicked little legs and scattered.

A high-pitched sound followed, echoing eerily off the tunnel's walls, and Jade crouched low, ready to pounce.

The egg golems rotated to their unhappy faces, and the spirits let out a battle cry as they charged.

Jade hesitated in joining when she caught the scent of their opponent.

Is that aâ€|?

Luckily, the group skidded to a halt when faced with a three-year-old blonde child, who looked up at them in stunned awe as the eggs in her grasp struggled to free themselves.

"Sophie?" Jack voiced, incredulous.

That broke the awkward moment, causing Bunny and North to quickly hide their weapons so as not to scare her further.

Sophie did not seem bothered at all; in fact, the moment she spotted the poor tagalong elf, she acted as if nothing had happened and chased him while shouting "Elf! Elf!"

"What is _she_ doing _here_?" Bunny demanded, nonplussed.

North pat down his coat, and flinched.

"Ahâ€|Snow Globeâ€|"

So the little girl was likely Jamie's sister, Jade figured, sitting down calmly and watching the child run around chasing whatever caught her eyes.

North, Bunny and Tooth _had_ been left sleeping in the boy's room, and all the ruckus had likely woken her.

"Crikey, somebody do something!" Bunny ordered, herding his poor eggs away from the little whirlwind of energy.

"Hey, don't look at me!" Jack voiced, holding up his hands in surrender. "I'm invisible, remember?"

"Don't worry, Bunny!" Tooth assured, fluttering closer. "I bet she's a fairy fan!"

Sophie stared up at the beautifully-feathered fairy and gasped in delight.

"It's okay, little one! You know what, I've got something for you!"

Tooth held out a handful of teeth, practically gushing.

"Look at all the little teeth, with blood and gum on them!"

â€|

Sophie promptly screamed and ran, the teenagers unable to keep from laughing.

"Blood and gums?" Jack parroted, teasing. "When was the last time you guys actually _hung out_ with kids?"

"We are very busy bringing joy to children! We don't have timeâ€|for children." North replied, fumbling near the end as he realized what he said.

"If one little kid can ruin Easter, then we're in worse shape than I thought." Jack noted.

Shaking out her scales, Jade stepped forward to calm the child, plopping down in her path and waiting.

Sophie did not disappoint, and ran straight into one of the Night Fury's strong forelegs, stepping dizzily back from the impact.

Gazing up at the comparatively-massive black dragon, the toddler seemed to falter, a twinge of uneaseâ€|

But then the dragon smiled, all soft gums and big, playful eyes, and the budding fear was gone.

Giggling, Sophie jumped up and climbed onto Jade's head as she lay down, patting the scaly black nose enthusiastically.

"Toothless!" She chanted, clearly enamored. "Toothless! Toothless!"

With a low croon, Jade raised her head and slid the child down her back, catching her at the end with a ready tail.

Now laughing in glee, she bounced back up to the Night Fury's head, clambering back on.

"Again, Toothless! Again!"

Laughing, Jade stood up, careful of her precious cargo.

Squealing, the toddler sat on her neck and gripped the dragon's ear horns like the handlebars of a bike as Jade started running.

Her gate was distinctly feline as she jumped off boulders and walls, careful not to twist too much and dislodge her rider.

Chuckling, Jack made one of his special snowflakes and let it loose, dodging the happy dragon as she zipped by.

The little drop of cold landed on Bunny's nose, melting with a spark of the winter spirit's magic, and he joined in the fun.

Sophie was happy to follow him, herding and painting the army of

eggs, and Jade transformed back into peace-form to help.

Stationed by the paint river, she reached in to scoop out the eggs that were unable to get out on their own, dying her claws myriad shades of pinks, blues, greens and yellows.

Ignoring it, the dragon-girl fished out three more little eggs, placing them feet-first on the grass.

They bowed slightly before toddling away, and she smiled at how cute they were.

Her ear horn twitched, but there was no time to react before Jade was shoved into the paint river herself.

Surfacing with a gasp, the girl shook off her tie-dyed wings, glaring at a hysterically-laughing Jack Frost.

"Look, I made a Rainbow Fury!"

With a play-growl, Jade pounced, knocking the unsuspecting boy over and staining his clothes with the paint as well.

"I'll show you a Rainbow Fury!" She mock-threatened, smearing pink and gold paint on his face.

"Hey, watch it!" Jack complained, laughing as he wrestled the smaller teenager to the ground. "It took forever to find a hoodie thisâ€¦"

The sentence trailed off on a soft breath as both realized the position they were in.

Chest still heaving with old laughter, Jade watched as that mysterious emotion filled Jack's eyes again, and her spark raced in time with her heart.

They were _so close_â€¦

Even through the brightly-colored paint, Jack could still make out the light green of her eyes.

The greens spattered on her skin could not even think to match, and he felt that strange heat fill his chest again.

_So very close_â€¦

Their breath mingled, hot and cold, misting the space between them.

Every instinct in Jade was telling her to submit, and her spark fluttered around in her chest like a fledgling during first flight.

There was a brief thought of _I wonder what her lips taste like_ before Jack decided to figure it out for himself.

But just as their mouth grazed each other-

"Crikey!"

Startled out of their daze, both pulled back and turned to see a rather sizable audience half-hidden by a small group of boulders glaring at a somewhat sheepish Bunny, who was using one paw to shield Sophie's eyes.

"Bunny!" Tooth chided, thwarted.

"We were almost at best part!" North agreed.

"Ya could have warned me!" The Easter Bunny defended himself. "I would have wanted ta see!"

It took a good twenty seconds for the teenagers to comprehend what was happening, but when they did, the reaction was immediate.

Jack jumped back a good five feet, valiantly fighting down a blush, and Jade shoved herself against a boulder, the red of her cheeks visible through the paint.

"Wh-What are you doing?" Jack demanded, upset by the interruption and the embarrassment his companion was likely feeling.

"Watching." North answered bluntly, smiling. "Is not every day we see two lovebirds having moment!"

Jade groaned, tail coming around to hide her face.

"Oh, you two are so _cute_!" Tooth gushed, Baby Tooth chirping in agreement. "Was that going to be your first kiss?"

They froze at the realization that it would have been.

It was a strangely pleasant thought.

"Ya better get cleaned up." Bunny noted, and motioned to one of the smaller tunnels. "There's a small waterfall through there that should get the paint out."

Glad for the excuse, Jade nodded and flew like an arrow into said opening, cheeks burning and mind racing.

Checking that no had followed, or was watching, the dragon-girl stripped off her dyed shirt and newly polka-dotted shorts, placing them on a rock before going under the spray.

Luckily, the paint had yet to dry, and came off easily enough.

Enjoying the cool water, her wings flexed, scales rippling so the liquid could get underneath and clean out any possible debris.

Undoing her braid, Jade let the water run through as she scrubbed her tail, careful of old scars.

Finally feeling clean, the dragon-girl sighed, attempting to clear her headâ€|

A faint sound, like a breath, startled her enough to whip around,

arms crossing to cover her chest and fire sparking against her teeth.

There was nothing.

That did nothing to settle her nerves.

Shaking herself semi-dry, and raising her heat to evaporate the rest of the water, Jade leapt towards her dry clothes to dress.

She did not feel safe being alone.

Jogging through the tunnel as she expertly braided her hair, the girl only paused for a moment to fix the ice ring to the end before rejoining the others in preparing for Easter.

There was still work to be done, after all.

13. Chapter 12

I found it strange that the sudden shift in our relationship was not the least bit alarming for me.

We had been friends for so long—

But maybe I had always felt this strongly?

I was a child when we first met, and my instincts had always associated Jack with the pack.

Was it because I saw him as family, or as a mate?

Mating was a mix of divine intervention and luck; sometimes, fledglings found their destined mates long before they were able to do anything about it.

I can name hundreds of tragedies written by the elderly dragons about fledglings finding their chosen, and then having more aggressive suitors, war and death rip them apart before consummation.

I didn't want to be one of those stories.

* * *

><p>Jade very studiously ignored the knowing looks everyone was giving her.<p>

Honestly, she was good at ignoring things that bothered her; three hundred years with Jack had made her immune to almost everything that would annoy a normal dragon.

The cold, loud noises, high-pitched whistling, and staring contests were part of everyday life, so she was able to tune them out into background noise rather easily.

The only thing she could not ignore was—

Jade yelped as someone pulled on her tail, spinning to glare at a laughing Jack, wings spread out like those of a startled

bird.

"Jack!"

"I couldn't help it!" He answered, slightly breathless. "You just looked so serious!"

Pouting as she rubbed the sting from her backside, Jade reached out and bopped the floating frost-boy upside the head.

"Bad, Jack." The girl scolded, a glint of amusement in her eyes.

Pulling a mock-hurt expression, he put a hand to his chest dramatically.

"You wound me!"

And just like that, it was as if the unexpected moment had never happened at all.

Jack was still Jack, and Jade was still Jade, and nothing would ever change that.

Giggling softly, the dragon-child shoved him playfully, pupils big and warm.

"You're so overdramatic!"

That mischievous smirk crossed Jack's face.

"Oh, I am, am I?"

Sensing what was coming, Jade turned to run and was caught around the middle by two cold arms.

Lifted off her feet, a laugh escaped as she kicked out, not really trying to escape.

"I'll show you overdramatic!" He claimed, tickling the pinned girl around sensitive wing joints and belly.

Wriggling to get away, Jade was breathless with laughter, tail lashing around and wings trying to flex outward despite Jack's sturdy presence.

After a good minute or two, Jack relented, unable to contain a chuckle of his own as she slumped against a rock, catching her breath.

"You are evil, Jack!" Jade complained, a smile tugging stubbornly at her mouth.

"At your service." He replied, bowing with a flourish.

Knocking the boy over with a swing of her tail, she turned back to herding some wayward eggs towards the exit tunnels.

Still smirking, Jack joined her, and soon the colorful army was marching down the last stretch, a straight shot to the surface.

Both spotted Bunny overlooking the scene, Sophie climbing into his arms with a yawn, and shared a look.

Touching down on the Australian's right with Jack, the dragon-girl was surprised at how relaxed he seemed, considering that Bunny is normally a rather grumpy individual.

"Not bad." Jack admitted softly, looking out at the eggs waddling towards their respective tunnels.

"Not bad yerselves." Bunny replied as Sophie yawned, already falling asleep.

"â€|Look, I'm sorry about the wholeâ€|you know, the kangaroo thingâ€|"

He was silent for a moment, but shrugged.

"It's the accent, isn't it?"

Jade barely managed a smile at the peaceful moment, feeling guilty.

Why couldn't she say the word 'sorry'?

Suddenly, a large paw ruffled her bangs, startling a laugh out of the girl as she spotted Bunny's understanding face.

"Kinda deserved it anyways." He said in explanation, his words holding a dual meaning. "No hard feelings."

Face lighting up in relief, she nodded, looking very much like a child that had just gotten the best present in the whole world.

It was heartbreaking.

The two males were distracted by the arrival of Tooth and North, Bunny cradling a sleeping Sophie more securely to his chest.

"Oh, poor little ankle-biterâ€|Look at her, all tuckered out."

"I love her." The fairy admitted, smiling as the toddler yawned. "I think it's time to get her home."

"How about we take her?" Jack offered, and Jade jumped to her feet, ready to go.

"Jack, no. Pitch is-"

"No match for us." The winter spirit finished, confident.

"Which is we need ya two here, with us." Bunny argued.

"We'll be back before you know it." Jade assured, smiling. "There's a reason my kind is associated with lightning, you know."

* * *

><p>As expected, the flight back to Burgess with Sophie in tow was

quick and uneventful.<p>

Perched on the windowsill, Jade kept a look-out for trouble as the frost-boy went into the room to deposit Sophie on the bed.

Baby Tooth zipped between them, giggling softly at the child's clingy sleeping habits.

Personally, Jade found it rather adorable.

Once Jack pried the little arms off his neck, leaving Sophie to slump on the mattress, he stood up-

And she rolled onto the floor with a THUNK.

All three winced, sympathetic.

"Sophie? Is that you?" A voice called from another room, most likely the girl's mother.

Panicking, Jack threw a blanket over the still-sleeping toddler and jumped out the window, closing it before they were caught.

Back pressed against the outer wall of the house, Jade let out a soft, misting breath.

"Nice one, Jack."

He sent her a look, amused and slightly competitive.

"I'd like to see you do better."

Rolling her eyes at the bait, the dragon-girl hovered into open air, a difficult task with such large wings.

"Come on, we need to get back."

Not about to argue, Jack moved to follow-

And stopped at the sound of a familiar voice calling his name.

Sensing the change in his attention, Jade turned back in confusion.

"Jack?"

"That voiceâ€¦I know that voiceâ€¦"

He took off, catching her off-guard.

"Jack!"

When no reply came, Jade and Baby Tooth shared a glance and followed, agitated by this turn of events.

They caught up in a clearing somewhere in the surrounding forest, and Jade landed without a sound, wings pulling in defensively at the sight of a dilapidated bed frame sitting ominously before them.

Jack did not hesitate to approach, despite Baby Tooth's protests, forcing the girl to do the same out of concern.

A hole gaped at them through the wooden beams, and her instincts _screamed_.

"Jack, I don't think this is such a good idea!" She warned, ear horns pressing back and tail wrapping around her ankle.

"Relax, we'll only be a minute." Jack assured, distracted.

"Oh, I'm not going in there." Jade insisted, arms crossing as the boy used his staff to knock a board out of the way. "Enclosed spaces are not my friends. Enclosed spaces can go die somewhere, because I am _never_ going near them again."

Jack jumped down as if he had not heard a word being said, and Jade sighed, defeated.

"_Damn_."

Leaping in after him, she tucked in her wings, spark flaring at the dead drop before she caught herself a scant foot from the cavern floor.

Baby Tooth was squeaking frantically, but Jade was distracted by the multitude of cages hanging from the ceiling, filled with

"Mini-fairies!" She realized, flying up to the nearest cage.

Fumbling around for a lock, the dragon-girl cursed under her breath as Jack flew past her towards the ones further in.

"Hey, it's okay." Jade cooed, the low purring of her tone soothing the little fairies. "I'm gonna get you out of here, alright? Just move to the other side, and I'll have this open in a sec."

Before she could call a bit of fire to her throat, the Night Fury realized how dark everything had suddenly become.

"Oh crap." She muttered, sensing danger.

Pushing off the cage, Jade barely avoided getting blindsided by a Nightmare.

Twisting sharply to dodge more of the dark sand, she let loose a barrage of fireballs, hoping to give herself some space to breathe.

"Jack!" She called out, shooting through the cave with a horde of Nightmares on her tail. "Oh, where's that boy when you need to make an exit?"

Weaving between pillars and cages and mounds of ivory tooth containers, her spark twisted painfully in growing worry when there was no reply.

Where was Jack?

"Jack!" The dragon-girl shouted again, pushing off a column and dispersing a Nightmare with a well-executed roundhouse kick.
"_Jack_!"

Nothing.

Oh stars, _where was Jack_?

Panic set in, making her heart race, and Jade was fairly sure she began to hyperventilate as she blurred through the cavern.

"_**JACK**_!"

Thoroughly distracted by her frantic search, she failed to react in time when a wave of dark sand struck from above, pinning her wings.

Thrashing about, shattering the sand's attempted grip on her legs and tail, Jade roared loud enough to shake the hanging cages.

The sound echoed in Jack's ears from inside Bunny's tunnel as he realized the mistake he had made.

14. Chapter 13

Jade felt very much like a caged bird, and she did _not_ like it.

Not one bit.

Though this cage was on the ground, it was not much bigger than the ones housing the fairies overhead and definitely sturdier.

As a dragon, she was quite a bit stronger than any human, but even her hardest kicks had done nothing beyond make the entire structure quake.

This entire situation was severely frustrating her, and she was mentally making a list of grievances to exact revenge over.

Just as she reached a milestone fifty, a shadow moved in her peripheral, and smoldering feline eyes caught triumphant, scheming yellow.

"Oh, _just_ what I needed." She grumbled sarcastically, rolling her eyes. "Isn't there a puppy somewhere you need to kick or something?"

Pitch seemed rather bemused by her sass, circling the cage slowly.

"You are not afraid."

"I thought we established this already." Jade pointed out, leaning back comfortably. "You don't even break the top ten."

"That was when you had the Guardians and Frost as support." Pitch

noted, not stopping his slow circling pace. "And yet you have no fear now, all alone and at my mercyâ€¦"

"That's a matter of perspective." The Night Fury responded, completely untroubled. "A caged tiger is no less dangerous than a wild one."

Any other being would have been intimidated, perhaps even frightened, by the veiled threat, but Pitchâ€¦

It excited him.

How long had it been, he wondered, _since someone had proved to be an equal?_

"I've met many of your kind over the centuries." The Nightmare King mused, eyes glowing through the dark. "But none quite as exquisite as you. Intelligent, deadlyâ€¦"

Sensing something off, Jade's pupils narrowed in suspicion as she began to wonder where this conversation was heading.

"You have such a strong sparkâ€¦" He purred, standing behind the stubbornly-unmoving dragon. "It's intoxicating."

Scales bristled, standing on-end like the fur of a threatened cat, and created a sharp barrier against any unwanted touches.

Jade was liking this entire situation less and less.

"Those large brutes may carry the name Monstrous Nightmare, but _you_ are the true fear-bringer, aren't you?"

She broke her silence in a burst of anger, her eyes like green fire and burning through Pitch's soul.

"_No, I'm not_."

"Still so young and naïve." He scolded lightly, brushing off the dragon-child's conviction. "You will realize what you are meant to be eventually, and so will they."

There was no need to ask who 'they' were, but Jade's expression stayed stony, eyes still burning.

"Do you really think they care for you?" Pitch wondered, still circling like a lazy predator. "They only kept you around to help defeat me. Once they have no use for you, they'll turn on you."

A faint twinge of uncertainty, of fear, but she fortified the cracks in moments with a surge of confidence.

It was impressive, and his infatuation grew.

"I'm not stupid." Jade voiced, calming herself. "This is a waste of both our time. You can talk all you want, but I'm not going to listen."

With that, she cocooned herself in large black wings, tail coming around to ripple in warning.

Letting out a soft breath, the winged girl reached into her shirt, pulling out the ice-ring that hung from a thin cord around her neck.

It pulsed a soft blue in the dark made by her wings, and settled her nerves like nothing else could.

Fingers curling around the seemingly-delicate piece, she ignored everything going on outside her little bubble, plans formulating.

Jade was not about to sit there, like some damsel in distress, and wait for someone to save her!

She is a dragon, a Night Fury, and there would never be a prison able to contain her!

After a moment, her shoulder's slumped, and she smacked her forehead against her knees.

That was what Jack would say, but she was not quite so sureâ€|

"You really are quite beautiful, you know."

Jade tensed up as those words penetrated her defenses.

"So small and sleekâ€|Under that waterfall, I almost mistook you for a dark angel."

There was a pause as the implications set inâ€|

"So _that's_ the sound privacy makes when it dies." Jade noted wittily. "Who'd have thought?"

A chuckle was her answer.

"Out of everything, _that's_ what you chose to focus on, my dear?"

Pitch was suddenly at her back, almost close enough to touch, and her ear horns twitched, laying flat as he took a long inhale of her scent.

Yeah, Jade was _really_ not liking where this whole situation was going right now.

Her tail reared up and swung for the man's head, missing only because he bled into the shadows at the last moment.

Sending him a glare, Jade pulled her tail back in, fins flexing warily.

"Ever heard of personal space?"

Pitch seemed to study the girl for a few moments, drinking in her features, before a slow, wicked smile formed.

One word went through Jade's mind.

Shit.

* * *

><p>Jade knew that, one day, someone would realize how much she and Jack cared for each other and act on it.<p>

After three hundred years, she had not expected it to happen like _this_.

Arms and wings pinned by nightmare-sand, the dragon-girl struggled violently against her restraints, unable to roar or spew fire from the grains holding her mouth closed.

Jack's grip tightened on his staff as Pitch moved towards the immobilized girl as if his offer of partnership had not just been shot down and he was not squeezing Baby Tooth.

"What's wrong, Jack?" He mocked, a smirk forming. "Did you forget that you left your little friend all alone in my lair?"

There was a stab of guilt, but Jack pushed it aside, aiming his staff at the Nightmare King.

"I've gotten to know her very well." Pitch continued, unperturbed. "So very bright and charmingâ€|"

Jade growled lowly as the man's free hand came up, stroking her face with false affection, and Jack's jaw clenched.

"Don't you think she would make a lovely Nightmare Queen?"

Whatever control the winter spirit had snapped.

"_Leave her alone_!"

A blast of ice slammed into a sudden wall of nightmare-sand, and only served to widen the shadow-man's smirk.

"Did I hit a nerve?"

Practically vibrating in rage, Jack could not tear his eyes away from Jade's, wide and slightly scared.

No one else would have noticed it, or the spark that said _I trust you_.

"Let them go, Pitch." He demanded, restraining himself from trying to freeze the man and shove him off the nearby cliff.

"_The staff, Jack_. Hand it over, and I'll let them go."

The frost-boy hesitated for a moment, torn.

His staff was the conduit, the source, of his power, and without it, he would no longer be able to bring winter or even fly.

Butâ€|

****All I know is that I wouldn't trade Jade for anything in the world.****

He would trade anything to get her back.

With one last resigned spin, Jack held his prized possession out for Pitch to take, the frost retreating from the wood once it left his grasp.

"Alright, now let them go." Jack voiced, holding a hand out for Baby Tooth.

"No."

Stunned by the blunt answer, he could only stare in bewilderment.

"You said you wanted to be alone, so be alone."

That set off both girls.

Baby Tooth acted first, stabbing Pitch's hand with her needle-like beak.

Flinching violently at the unexpected pain, the Nightmare King flung the helpless mini-fairy into an icy wall.

Jade's spark flared up like a forest fire, and she shattered her restraints with a roar.

Pulling a fist back, she whirled in a tight circle and struck the shadow-man full in the face hard enough to send him flying.

Heart racing, the Night Fury turned back to Jack, wings unfurling from her desperate need to get out of there.

"Jack-"

The crack of wood snapping echoed in her ears with Jack's scream.

"JACK!"

Before she could move, or even think, nightmare-sand slammed into her back.

Pinned down, Jade screeched in panic, wings trying in vain to flex and tail whipping around in a frenzy.

"Jade." The winter spirit whispered just as he was knocked off his feet and into a ravine.

She could only watch, heart cracking, and closed her eyes as the burn of tears came.

No_â€

Emotions rushed through her in bursts, overwhelming in their intensity.

Anger, guilt, panic, sadnessâ€¦

Jade felt overwhelmed.

So, like she had hundreds of times before, she shut everything out.

It was her way of dealing with the pain, numbing herself to everything and not allowing sensations to reach past her walls.

Hugging her knees, wings limp against the damp stone floor, Jade tried to ignore the shattered remains of her heart.

Nightmare-sand lurked at the edges of her cage, the grains rolling over each other in sinister whispers.

Pathetic.

Weak.

Failure.

Jade could not find the strength to argue with the voices, could only close her eyes and turn her face away in defeat.

You couldn't save him.

You can't save anyone.

_Everything good is dead, __**and it's all your fault**_.

I know, her soul whimpered, _I know and I'm so sorryâ€¦_

The nightmare-sand crept closer, as if ready to pounce, and she made no move to avoid it.

Who would care if she was gone, anyway?

She was only a burdenâ€¦

Suddenly, something disrupted the darkness, and her eyes needed a moment to adjust before the girl realized what it was.

The ring hanging between her breasts was glowing.

The blank green eyes lit up, a sparkle of hope.

Was Jackâ€¦?

Numb fingers curled around the icy jewelry, and the thrum of it's magic, _Jack's magic_, pulsed against her palm.

It was the feeling of snow against her skin and a cold breeze through her hair, the rush of laughter after a nosedive and the peace of a night under the stars.

The memories warmed her heart, calmed the storm of emotions there and slowly brought down the wall that Jade had built to defend herself.

Jack had done so much for her; taught her how to play, and laugh, even how to fly!

Honestly, she had been a little scared, looking over the edge of that cliff and not being able to see the bottom.

But Jack had just smiled, floating a few feet out over the drop.

"_Trust me, fluffy. I won't let you fall._"

And he hadn't.

Just remembering his words gave her confidence, conviction.

No matter what, Jack had always been right there, and nothing she could have done would make him leave.

How many times had they crashed into each other, or argued over something silly?

How many times had she stormed off in a huff, cursing in draconic over a prank, only for Jack to seek her out within the hour, full of apologies?

After everything they had been through, she refused to let things end here!

Filled with a new resolve, the dragon-girl unfurled, wings flexing and twitching as fresh blood flowed beneath the black scales.

The nightmare-sand, as if sensing her growing strength, whispered more fiercely as it formed into Nightmares.

They hate you.

They'll never accept you.

**You're all alone**.

For a moment, Jade faltered.

The ring pulsed once, strongly, and the words engraved on the inner band burned through her mind.

Never Alone.

"I don't care!" The Night Fury snarled, scales bristling. "I don't care if no one wants anything to do with me ever again! The Guardians and Jack are my pack, and I refuse to keep wallowing in self-pity while they need me!"

Her spark flared up, the magic funneling into the ring still clasped in her hand and causing the light that escaped between her fingers to grow brighter.

"And if you get in my way, _you're not going to live to regret it_!"

A rush of magic burst forth, like an explosion of light and heat, that evaporated her prison and destroyed the army of shadows galloping forward in a vain attempt to stop her.

Dizzy from the sudden loss of energy, Jade blinked the stars away as she overlooked the carnage.

Shaking the fatigue off, the dragon-girl spared one last glance at the ring to strengthen her determination, and pressed a kiss to the blooming rose.

I'm coming, Jack.

* * *

><p>Facing down a flaming Monstrous Nightmare and an army of Nightmares, Jack wondered for the millionth time where Jade was.<p>

She was nowhere to be found in Pitch's lair, and he had been forced to race to Jamie's house before expanding the search.

Was she alright?

Did Pitch still have her somewhere?

Despite being faced with certain doom, all Jack could worry about was Jade and the children.

The massive dragon opened it's fang-lined mouth with a hiss of flammable gas, and the Guardians stepped back, shielding Jamie as best they could.

Just as the faintest spark was about to be lit, an inhuman shriek filled the night air.

Recognizing the sound, Jack turned sharply and pulled Jamie close.

"GET DOWN!"

The next moment, a black blur slammed into the Monstrous Nightmare's head.

Screeching in surprise, the larger dragon struggled to dislodge the livid Night Fury holding it's jaws shut, rolling over in a vain attempt to break her hold.

Fangs bared in a snarl, Jade clamped her fangs on a horn, yanking the dragon's head back around as her claws dug into it's shoulders and back.

The pair of dragons were a violent bundle of wings, claws and teeth, wrestling for the upper hand.

With one last effort, Jade turned the tables and pinned the Monstrous

Nightmare, a paw pressing down on the spindly neck.

"**Don't you ever come back here again.**" She ordered in the low, growling words of draconic. "**Or you will wish all I'll do is kill you, flame-skin.**"

The massive dragon wasted no time in heeding her words and fleeing without a backwards glance.

Shaking out her scales, the Night Fury transformed back into peace-form, no less furious than before as she stood between the nervous Nightmares and her pack.

Wings unfurled, Jade scanned the others to check for injuries, green locking with blue.

In that moment, they shared the guilt, the worry, and the love that had gone unsaid, as if their thoughts were open in each other's eyes.

Blue flickered once, towards the make-shift sleigh and other odds and ends nearby.

Green rolled towards one of the nearby trucks, narrow pupils widening slightly in mischief.

The exchange took only a handful of seconds, but that was all they needed.

"Well, isn't this a surprise?" Pitch voiced, drawing the attention back to him. "I wasn't expecting you for a few more days, my dear. Have you considered my proposal?"

A flash of rage crossed her eyes, but Jade smoothed her features into an untroubled expression, only the slightest of frowns as a warning.

"You want me to consider it?" She wondered, monotone, and Jack knew that was a really bad sign. "Fine. I've considered it."

Reaching out, the dragon-girl grabbed the rear bumper of a delivery truck, the metal crumpling in her hold.

"Here's my answer."

Everyone but Jack was awestruck when she lifted the ten ton vehicle and chucked it at the Nightmare King's face.

Pitch avoided being squashed by blending into the shadows, though a swath of Nightmares were destroyed instead.

The momentary distraction was all they needed.

Whipping around, Jade grabbed North and Tooth, shoving them onto the make-shift sleds Jack shoved onto his newly-made ice ramp.

"Let's go get your friends." The winter spirit said in way of explanation, smiling at the last believer.

Jamie was picked up before he could so much as blink, and was tossed

into Jack's arms as the wind pushed everyone forward.

Giving the heavier North one good shove, Jade flew ahead, her wings cutting through whatever Nightmares were catching onto the plan.

If any dragon had seen her do so, they would have been flabbergasted.

After all, _a downed dragon is a dead dragon_.

Jade did not think twice about it, too focused on the mission to care if anything hurt her wings.

They slid down the streets at high speed, Jamie laughing at the reminder of his earlier ride as the earthbound Guardians twisted and turned through the streets behind him.

Forming snowballs, Jack tossed them up so Jade could use her tail fins to smack them into bedroom windows, waking up the children within.

The startled faces peering out, still sparkling with magic, made her laugh for the first time in hours.

Jack was having the time of his life, making ramps and loops while bringing snow indoors so the children would believe.

"Merry Christmas!"

"Happy Easter!"

"Don't forget to floss!"

Soon, a small group had joined them on proper sleds, hooting and hollering as they slid around corners at insane speeds.

"The Tooth Fairy!"

"And the Easter Bunny!"

"Santa! They're all real!"

Even Jack was visible, and she could not hold in a celebratory fireball, flying through in a burst of white sparks that had the children cheering in amazement.

The laughter faded out prematurely along with the ice as they were faced with a wall of black sand.

Swooping down, Jade draped her wings over the children like a shield, the warmth comforting the ones that had begun to tremble.

Pitch was on a rooftop above them, riding a Nightmare and looking very smug.

"You think a few children can help you? Against _this_?"

It was like watching a storm approach, full of lightning and chaos, and her wings tensed.

"They're just bad dreams, Jamie." Jack assured, steadying North as his strength faded.

"We'll protect ya, mate." Bunny assured, his little body bristling.

"Aw, you'll protect _them_?" Pitch mocked, chuckling. "But who will protect _you_?"

â€|

"I will."

The group parted as the Night Fury stepped forward, expression steely.

"If you want them, you'll have to go through me first." She promised fiercely.

The Nightmare King frowned, not liking this turn of events.

"You may want to reconsider, my dear."

"No, I don't." The dragon-girl replied, firm. "I've been through the childhood you want to give these kids. I was scared of every shadow, every strange soundâ€|Never knowing if they were a trick of the senses or a dragon hunting me down. I don't call that existence _living_."

The ring brightened against the dyed colors of her shirt, channeling the magic pulsing from her spark.

"_**I won't let you put any child through the hell I went through as a hatchling**_."

None of the children could quite explain it, but the white-blue light coming from the icy jewelry started pushing back their fear.

Jamie felt a sort of determination, some sort of bravery, fill his chest like a flame.

"I'll help, too."

Jade's ear horn twitched, and she shifted slightly as the boy stepped up to her side.

"Me, too." A larger girl added, an intimidating scowl on her face.

"Us, too!" The twins added seriously, taking their places under the shelter of the Night Fury's unfurled wings.

Soon, the entire group had joined her, taking strength from the mighty dragon's close presence and the light still shining over her heart.

They were not afraid anymore.

"Still think there's no such thing as the Boogieman?" Pitch demanded as the wall of nightmare-sand rolled closer, knocking out lamps to

cast the open street in darkness.

"I _do_ believe in you." Jamie admitted, firm. "_I'm just not afraid of you_."

The dark Nightmares came crashing down towards them, and Jade rushed forward to stop them-

And the grains turned gold upon contact with their skin.

Twisting out of her quick take-off, the dragon-child looked around in awe as dreams formed from the renewed dream-sand, reaching out with one hand to touch a passing Nightmare.

The dark creature screamed as it's body turned gold, and a wonderful smile filled Jade's face as the sand became a beautiful serpentine dragon being ridden by a knight instead.

Cheers came from below, and she turned to see Tooth zip around the children, overjoyed that she was once again strong enough to fly.

North laughed joyfully as his strength was renewed, spinning his sabers like they were toys.

The smile widened, threatening to split her face.

Children were believing again.

The remaining Nightmares charged, and she swooped down, turning any that touched even the tips of her wings back into dream-sand.

Portals were opened, and yeti ran out with angry battle-cries as various flying toys filled the air, a few elves sometimes latching onto a leg and biting.

The rush of belief even returned Bunny to his original size, and he opened tunnels that transported his large egg golems to join the battle.

It was a joyous chaos, though Jade was careful to keep all of the children in sight as she destroyed the ranks, the light from her ring now scaring the beasts into a hasty retreat.

Pulling up from a dive, she spotted Jack throwing ice blasts at the Nightmare King and immediately moved to join him.

A blast of nightmare-sand exploded in midair thanks to a lightning-colored fireball, and Pitch was formally reacquainted with Jade's right fist as she punched him across the rooftop.

Jack could not help an impressed whistle at the blow, jumping to stand next to her.

"Feel better?"

She huffed, flames crackling on her breath.

"Not until I've broken every bone in his body."

Pitch had no time to regain his footing before the two were upon him, fire and ice hissing through the air together in an attempt to destroy him.

The pair was relentless, seeking revenge for everything that had been done to them and the Guardians, as well as the children's safety.

A sphere of nightmare-sand erupted as Tooth's wings flew through it like blades, and Bunny popped up from the building's chimney to throw his boomerangs, taking out more of Pitch's personal entourage.

For a moment, Jade wondered where North was, but ignored the thought as she tackled a Nightmare into a cloud of golden dust.

When Pitch tried to jump across the street, North met him mid-flight and slashed his steed to dust, bringing the fight abruptly to ground level.

The five fought like a well-oiled machine; when one was knocked out of the confrontation, another took their place, not once getting in each other's way.

In-sync, the two teenagers kicked the Nightmare King back as the Guardians regrouped, closing the dark spirit into a dead-end alley.

Blue fire swelled up in her throat, ready for use.

"It's over, Pitch. There's no place to hide." Jack stated, wary of the massive sand-scythe the other wielded.

Pitch truly did seem caughtâ€¦

Until he cackled, blending into the shadows and using illusions, confusing the spirits that tried to relocate him.

But he did not fool the Night Fury.

Her species was made for dark, moonless nights, so their eyes had long evolved to see through the densest shadows in search of prey.

So while the others were on guard, wondering where the Nightmare King had gone, Jade saw through his plan and acted.

Just as Pitch materialized behind Jack, weapon raised to slice the boy to ribbons, she pounced.

With a roar that would have put any lion to shame, her forearm scattered the blade into swirls of gold dream-sand as a blast of lightning-fire sent the man toppling back into the parked school buses.

Before Pitch could even attempt to stand, a little gold hand grabbed him by the collar and yanked him into the air.

Jade blinked in surprise, pupils dilating in hope.

Could it beâ€¦?

The group rushed to see what had happened, and there was Sandman, materializing from a cloud of dream-sand as good as new.

Tears of joy pricked at Jade's eyes, overwhelming in a way that she enjoyed.

Sandy was alive.

Punching the dark spirit high into the clouds, still connected to a dream-whip, Sandy took the time to materialize a bowler hat to tip towards the awestruck children before flicking his wrist and slamming Pitch into the ground.

Unable to contain herself, Jade swooped in and lifted the little man into a hug, a handful of tears soaking into his shoulder.

"You have no idea how much we missed you." She whispered.

Sandy smiled gently, patting her nose, and the action warmed her heart.

Releasing him, the dragon-girl stepped back so the other Guardians could reunite with their wayward member, sharing a smile with Jack.

Rising on a cloud of dream-sand, Sandy spread his dreams all over the world, and the sudden swell of belief was almost tangible.

Large dream-sand constructs wandered the streets, animals of all sorts soaring and stomping along, driving the shadows back.

The children were awestruck, only able to giggle and watch schools of golden fish swim by.

Jade smiled, watching them chase each other through the snowâ€¦

At least until a snowball smacked her upside the head.

Flinching in surprise, the dragon-child whipped around, mock-glaring at a smirking Jack Frost.

"Up for a little fun, fluffy?"

A matching smirk crossed her face, tail swaying like a prowling cat's.

"Bring it on, Jackie."

Snow was flung around chaotically, either molded into ammunition or in sprays from the Night Fury's skids, and caused the children to start a snowball fight amongst themselves.

Everyone was involved, even Bunny, but Jade was too preoccupied with catching the laughing winter spirit to really notice.

Tackling Jack to the ground, she laughed as they wrestled for dominance, the winter spirit pinning her down after a few moments.

Breathless, the dragon-girl looked up into those blue eyes and smiled.

Heart thundering, the frost-boy smiled softly back and leaned in.

It was like sunrises and snowflakes and sweet sugar as their lips met, cold and hot coexisting in a wonderful spark.

Closing her eyes, Jade wrapped her arms around the boy's neck to pull him closer, head tilting to accommodate the kiss better.

Jack groaned, becoming addicted to her heat, and his hands moved to cup the girl's face.

Pulling away as air became a necessity, they shared a loopy grin before a happy squeal drew the teenagers' attention away from each other.

Tooth and her mini-fairies seemed absolutely smitten, like they had just seen the sweetest thing in the whole world, and Sandy grinned, little hearts appearing over his head as he gave them a thumbs-up.

North looked awfully pleased, as if he had orchestrated the whole thing, and Bunny grumbled as he handed the large man something.

Looks like someone lost a bet.

Blushing at all the attention, Jade hid her face in Jack's hoodie, ear horns pressed back shyly as Tooth cooed about how _cute_ that was.

Laughing softly, Jack tangled his fingers in her loosened hair, pressing a kiss between the sensitive appendages.

"At least you're not covered in paint this time."

Scoffing, she bopped him on the chest.

"Oh, stuff it!"

Greatly amused by her antics, Jack let her up, their fingers intertwined despite her pout.

"You _dare_ have fun in my presence?!"

The shout caught everyone's attention, drawing it towards the recently-awakened Pitch.

"I am the Boogieman! And you _will_ fear me!"

At that moment, Jamie ran right through him.

The realization dawned on him, and the Nightmare King ran away, slipping on the icy ground in his haste to escape.

Too bad they got to the lake first and North's belly cut him off.

"Leaving the party so soon?" The Russian wondered casually.

"You didn't even say goodbye." Tooth agreed, flipping a quarter into his chest, twisting his features incredulously.

"A quarter?"

The fairy proceeded to punch out a tooth, which sounded very satisfying to everyone involved.

"And that's for my fairies."

The little hummingbird creatures chattered in agreement, chastising him.

"You can't get rid of me!" Pitch warned, trying to regain his composure. "Not forever! There will always be fear!"

"So what?" North retorted, untroubled. "As long as one child believes, we will be here to fight fear."

"And as long as I'm alive, I'll be here to protect the Guardians." Jade promised. "You'll never win."

"Really? Then what are they doing here?" He wondered, gesturing to the Nightmares that began surrounding the frozen lake.

"They can't be my Nightmares. I'm not afraid." North assured with a chuckle.

Confusion filled the dark spirit, as if he could not comprehend what was happening for a moment.

Jack, vindictive over the trauma Jade had been put through, voiced Pitch's fear.

"Looks like it's your fear they smell."

The beasts overwhelmed their master in a rush of thunder and screams, sealing him away in the hole that had lured the teens into trouble only a few hours ago.

And just like that, it was over.

Jade could hardly believe it.

"Are you ready now, Jack?" North wondered. "To make it official."

Jack smiled, clearly touched, and nodded.

"It is time you take Oath." North stated, taking the large tome from one of the yeti as the egg golems, children and elves joined them on the ice. "Will you, Jack Frost, vow to watch over the children of the world? To guard them with your life, their hopes, their wishes, and their dreams, for they are all we have, all that we are, and all that we will ever be?"

The winter spirit turned to his first believers, the little boy that had not given up and the dragon-girl that had always been by his

side.

Both smiled back, giving their unconditional support, and Jack finally found his voice.

"I will."

"Then congratulations, Jack Frost, for you are now, and forevermore, a Guardian."

Cheers went up among the masses, but Jack did not pay them much mind.

He was focused in on the girl standing only a few feet away, smiling oh so sweetly and with undeniable love shining in her eyes.

Oh Moon, the sight was enough to make his heart skip a few beats.

"Everything's going to be different now, huh?" She voiced, tone gentle and a little bit apprehensive, as those eyes cast downward.

A cool hand tipped her chin back up, comforting blue eyes meeting uncertain green.

"Not really."

There is no need to say more, because she understands.

Relieved, Jade bounced up on her toes to press a warm kiss to the boy's mouth, smile mischievous.

"I'm not good at sharing with others."

A matching smirk crossed Jack's face, and he nipped the girl's nose as his arms wrapped around her waist.

"Good, because neither am I."

16. END STATEMENT

Hello, everyone! I know you're all excited about the sequel, and I'm happy to say that the (admittedly short) wait is over!

'Rise of the Guardians: War' continues Jade's story, and the Guardians are dragged along for the ride!

I'm still open for suggestions, since (while I have the overall idea of where things are going) I'm a little stuck on the details. Anything like sweet moments between Jade and Jack, familial moments among the Guardians, and so on.

Enjoy!

End
file.